Paradigm Shift

-Avi

(Revised Edition)

Introduction

This is the type of book that is meant to be read slowly, almost like one of those chapter a day inspirational books. As such, it is suggested that you don't read more than one overall section a day (there are four major sections). A few chapters a day would be a good pace. But any faster than a section a day is not recommended, as it would really lessen what you take out of it. Your choice of course, but if you speed through it, you're likely to get less out of it. It's meant to be a slower read that kind of works on you a bit over time while you contemplate and think over the ideas in the chapters that you read. The book seems quite simple at first, but it builds as it goes, and overall, it's actually fairly dense reading with a lot of ideas. So take your time.

The book itself starts very slowly with some relationship issues, then shifts into economics issues, then into issues of violence, and then finally into issues of spirituality.
Read with an open mind, and let yourself think deeply.
Take each chapter and kick it around with your mind and let it work on you some during the day.
You may find yourself getting even more out of a chapter than you thought at first glance.
Give it a chance, and by the time you finish reading it, I think you will realize the book brings quite a lot all together in one place.
And hopefully it will help make our world a little bit better.
Enjoy.

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Part 1 - Relationships

Note- In this overall section, I am speaking as a heterosexual about issues between men and women that have been problematic for generations. However, a lot of these issues involving relationship dynamics may apply and be useful across the sexuality/gender spectrum.

1. Being single

To be in a balanced relationship, you also have to be okay on your own.
It's tough to stand happily on your own two feet in a relationship, if you don't feel that you can stand happily on your own two feet when you're not in a relationship.
There is a big difference between being alone and being lonely, and being single at times is a highly valuable tool for learning about yourself and how to remain an individual in any relationship in the future.

2. Communication and Honesty in Relationships

Relationships can be complex. But two things that make a relationship more complex than it needs to be are a lack of communication and a lack of honesty.

Open, honest communication is one of the biggest keys to any relationship.
We all need to have space for our own thoughts, and no one needs constant updates, but if we don't consistently communicate with someone in a relationship, then small disagreements which are kept quiet do tend to build. It's good to be accepting of others' faults, but legitimate conflicts that bother us in a relationship need to be discussed.

In terms of honesty, life is too short to live without integrity. There is a valuable currency to the honesty that exists between people, and you don't ever want to lose that. We all deserve honesty, and we inherently respect it, even when it's something we don't want to hear. It is a currency between human beings that should never be devalued.

And lying on some level means that we're afraid. When you speak the truth instead, even when it's difficult, there is often a certain joy you feel in doing so, as you conquer that fear and the weight of it is lifted.

When it comes to problematic relationships, you certainly don't owe anyone a relationship if you don't choose to be in one with them, but if that's the case, then you do owe them "the conversation." You owe them the respect and honesty that they deserve as a human being. And learning to never shy away from that responsibility in relationships is part of being an adult.

3. Saying no to people

It’s good to be open to possibility, but we also have to be able to say no sometimes.
We always try to be loving and patient, but it’s important to be able to say no and be honest and strong in our own life choices.

4. Sex and the ego

A lot of people, mainly men but not always, tend to make sex about power. The ego is a powerful thing, and if you let it take control, it can become all about you and no one else.
You can become a kind of ego creature, where you just feed the ego insatiably, and it becomes all about sexual conquest, possession, sexual attention, control, power, or domination. And when we do that, then sex becomes just another act of consumption, with little human connection or empathy, just consuming to feed the ego, but still remaining just the same afterwards.

It doesn't have to be like that though. It can be much more satisfying for both people.
And that often starts with trying to be more balanced, and not letting your interactions be driven solely by your own ego, or theirs.

For a lot of men, that usually begins with learning to put someone else first in bed.

And a note for women on that topic...the feeling of being wanted can seem like a powerful drug...but you can't let your life revolve around that attention...if a man doesn't put others first consistently, as women often do, then he simply does not deserve you.

We have all been conditioned to at least some degree by society, by what we see, or by our relationships with people. But once we realize that, then we can work on it.

Because things really do need to even out. It's understandable that feeling at least something often seems better than feeling nothing, but things have been so out of balance for so long.
We need to rebalance, in the sense that men need to care more about women's pleasure, and women need to care more about being sexually satisfied themselves, and then we can meet somewhere in the middle.
Why would anyone deserve anything less?

5. Loving relationships

To have a real connection with someone...if you've ever been physical with that, and without that, the difference is tremendous.

And then, to have an intimate relationship with someone that is also a friendship, when you truly see and love someone for who they are, that really is an amazing thing.

6. You're fine.

When it comes to relationships, there's really no such thing as being damaged or broken. That's typically a scam to keep you in a certain mindset. You're whole. You're fine. And don't believe anyone who says otherwise.
Your soul is inviolable, and there's nothing damaged about you, although you may be carrying some negative emotions, habits, or memories until you decide to let them go and move on with your life.
We all have to learn not to be a slave to our negative experiences, but to move past them.

7. Gender Equality and Feminism

Feminism today takes many different forms. There are many different schools of feminism and they don't always agree on everything, but they are basically all different ways of looking at a common problem.
At the end of the day though, if you believe that men and women are equal as human beings and should be equal in as many ways as possible, then you are a feminist. And that's a good thing. We should all be feminists in that sense.

Historically, male hegemony or patriarchy is probably humanity's longest lasting hierarchical relationship, and one which still exists in most places around the world.

One of the advantages of studying feminism, or really any of the cultural studies that encourage critical thought, is that you begin to be able to recognize a hegemonic discourse. A hegemonic discourse is essentially the social narratives we tell ourselves about how the world is, the ones that become so dominant and normalized that they become kind of invisible, and people no longer recognize them for what they are...social constructs. We often no longer recognize that there are alternatives, because all we see is "That's the way things are."

Recognizing those sorts of constructs and hierarchies, and thinking critically about them, is a key part of moving towards equality.
The relationship between men and women has been out of balance for a long, long, long time. None of us are perfect, so it's a process, but we are hopefully all working towards a more balanced world where men and women really see each other as equals.

8. Sexuality and Gender

We are starting to realize that sexuality and gender can be kind of a grey area.
Some people are attracted to women, some people are attracted to men, some are attracted to both, and some neither.

And in terms of gender, while a physical gender is determined for most people at birth, a gender identity is largely a construct, which people may or may not identify with.
And we have historically often been locked into socially created ideas of what is more "masculine" or more "feminine," what kind of behavior is acceptable for a man versus what kind of behavior is acceptable for a woman. And we have at times allowed those stereotypes to control our actions.

Although we still have a ways to go, we're now getting better at not allowing those types of things to define us. We're starting to realize that you are how you choose to be, you love who you choose to love, and no one decides who you are, and how you are, but you.

Differences often take some getting used to for most people, but as our comfort levels start to settle down regarding the differences of our fellow human beings, we're beginning to realize that it's not a simple black and white situation for everyone, that we all have so-called masculine and feminine qualities, and that people will exist in the world as they choose.
Love knows no sexuality, gender, race, or religion. Human beings have minor differences, but we are always much more alike than we are different, and we all deserve love and respect.

9. The Male Gaze

When it comes to the male gaze, if you're a woman, you often have to live in what is essentially a meat market from the time you're an adolescent onwards. And that is a lot to deal with.
In a culture that often hypersexualizes girls' bodies so early, women are basically destined to get unwanted attention pretty much anywhere they go.

Everyone enjoys attention sometimes from those they are attracted to, but this is not about getting invited attention from someone you have shown interest in. It's about being subjected to the male libido all the time wherever you go, and often not with politeness or subtlety, but with disrespect and aggression.

Women shouldn't have to deal with that just to walk down the street and live their lives. No one should.
And the answer isn't in locking women behind a curtain, the answer is in changing our culture.
More men need to start seeing women as human beings and not just objects.
No one needs to walk around with blinders on, but there is a difference between a look and a leer.
Men really need to learn the phrase, "Look, but Don't Leer."

More men need to learn not only self control, but also more empathy, to respect someone as a human being.
You should never want to make someone uncomfortable. And if that happens, then you should apologize like an adult and move on.
If we teach humanity more of these things, then men and women will find a better balance where women feel they can finally walk the world freely.

10. Abortion rights

I'm personally pro-choice because I think that if there is something growing inside your body, then it should be up to you.
If you told men they were going to be injected with something that was going to grow inside their bodies, that they didn't want, then abortion would have probably been fully legalized a long time ago.
There is a certain irony when people care more about a potential human being than they do about the human beings who are already here. No one wants abortions to take place, but the easiest answer to that lies in better and freely available birth control.
If society has a general consensus about when the term limits are on abortion, then fine. But other than that, I think it should be a woman's choice about what goes on within her own body.

11. Procreation

Having children can be a way to give back and a way to learn, but it is certainly not the only way or even the greatest way to contribute to the world.

If you do decide to have children, just make sure that it is a *conscious* decision.

When making a major decision like that, it doesn't make sense to just march lock-step to societal pressures or biological pressures. And the drive to procreate, for both females and males, tends to be pretty mindless.
So make the choice to be aware, and to not let your drives control you, instead of the other way around. Make conscious decisions.

It takes a village to raise a child. Raising human beings that are wiser, more enlightened, and more loving is much more of a priority than simply raising more of them.

Because too often, we're basically just kids having kids.

And being a good parent is a serious long-term commitment.
That's one reason why birth control is important. People should be able to have sex without being a slave to biology. We all have the right to choose and make conscious decisions about procreation.

To continually multiply and consume, multiply and consume, more, more, more, isn't the reason we are here. If anything, that kind of culture and overpopulated numbers make our existence here more difficult, not less.

Don't fall for the old population pyramid scheme rationale. Humanity has never been in danger of going extinct from underpopulation. Overpopulation is much more of a threat to us than underpopulation has ever been. Humanity doesn't need to grow, it needs to mature, it always has. And with eight billion people here, we'll obviously be around for quite a while, if we don't destroy everything first.

But we have a habit of not doing much about the toughest human problems that we face, and instead just multiplying and then passing the buck to the next generation.

In a spiritual sense, if you believe in an afterlife, then having children would be fairly irrelevant to your soul's progression. In many religions, it is not the only path back to the world, nor even the best one.
Passing the candle of wisdom, knowledge, and love to your fellow human beings here and now is far more important than multiplying.

Those of us who are here, are here for each other. You'll often hear people say, "I feel the need to have a family," but we actually already have one, we just have to look around.
Anyone can have a child, but it's what you do for the quality of life for all human beings in the world while you are here, not the quantity.
And if you do decide to have children, just make sure that it is an aware, conscious decision. Just know why you choose what you choose, and then commit to it.

12. Family

Remember, we are not defined by family or circumstance. Those things may contribute to our experience, but they don't determine who we are, only our choices do that.

Parents and children often learn well from each other.
And family can be a really wonderful thing.
But that is a key distinction...can be. Because that isn't always the case.
We have probably all seen how some parents project their fears, angers, prejudices, or selfishness onto their children. And that can be something we have to battle get away from, especially as we get older. Always remember, it's your life, and yours alone. It's not indentured servitude.
Because the positive or negative energy around someone can be a very real thing, and sometimes we have to remember not to get bogged down in others' negativity.
As with any relationship, sometimes you have to know when to just step away if someone is consistently being toxic.

Because as we grow older, we often come to realize that our family is whatever family we choose. It's a spiritual kinship, not defined by blood, although our physical family may be included if we like.
But it's your life, no one else's, and you can choose the company that you keep while you're here.

Part 2 - Economics

1. Economic Inequality

Based on recent US Census statistics, the top 3% of the wealthiest people control over 50% of the entire wealth in the country.
And the top 10% control over 70% of the wealth in the country.

And worldwide, according to a Credit Suisse study, the top 8% of the wealthiest people control roughly 80% of the world's wealth.

How is that okay?

How is it acceptable for one person to have to work for a month to earn what another earns in just an hour?

Who ever convinced us that "that's just how the world works"?

The vast majority of the people in the top 10% are certainly good people, but the economic system itself that we have all allowed to exist, one that holds one person so much farther above another, is absurd.

We seem to have fallen for the idea that to take more than your fair share is somehow a "right." That one person is just much more blessed, or lucky, or deserving of wealth than everyone else. But really, who in the world deserves so much more than everyone else?

We have forgotten that we share the world, and that nothing is done in a vacuum.
Intelligence and hard work are excellent, but even if you invent a product that sells, it still depends on everyone else...those who buy it, those who work for you, etc. There is an important relationship there. The product does not get created and sold in a vacuum, it still always depends entirely on the human community for success.
And yet, even though that success depends on the human community, we act as though the wealth created from it is somehow created independently, and that we therefore deserve to live exponentially wealthier lives than all of the human beings who help us succeed.

The world is a mix of independence and interdependence.
And yet, when it comes to accumulating wealth, we often conveniently forget the latter.

Essentially, in a shared world, with shared resources, we have chosen to *allow hoarding*.
Does that seem right?
Or sensible?

Not only that, but honest hard work is not at all equivalent to our wealth.
Someone working hard at one job should not get paid a thousand times less than someone else

working hard at another job, no matter what those two jobs are.

And we also talk a lot about equal "opportunity," but if one person is born with 3 million dollars in the bank, and another person is born with 300 dollars in the bank, then they probably won't have much of an equal opportunity, will they?
Not to mention that equal opportunity is simply the chance to compete against each other, it has nothing to do with actual equality.

We sometimes fall for the mirage that it's all equal, when in fact, it never really was. Although there is some up and down variance, the majority of people who are poor and work hard, stay poor...the majority of people who are rich, whether they work hard or not, stay rich...and the majority of people in the middle stay about the same.
And so people continue to gamble, in the hopes that they'll be the ones who get rich, but they never stop to ask themselves if we could simply do things differently.

We've got a system that allows the rich to own the Earth, the poor to rent it like indentured sharecroppers, and the rest to exist somewhere in between.
For example, the idea of usury, and arguably interest lending itself, is essentially that those without money can gain, but only if those who already have money gain more. So the unequal relationship between rich and poor is largely maintained. And debt is then further on tied to everything from education to healthcare to having shelter.
You would think having shelter, having a home, in a shared world which has room for us all and belongs to us all, would be a basic right that wouldn't require you to be in debt to those who are simply wealthier. But you would be wrong.
And perhaps it shouldn't be like that.

At this point, people have started to realize that "trickle-down economics" is largely a myth and does very little for economic equality, as our economy is still basically shaped like a pyramid structure.
We often discuss structural inequalities, and those are very important to recognize, especially in this case, since our economic system itself actually functions to maintain one massive structural inequality.
10% of the people own over 70% of the wealth.
We've all been locked into a system that doesn't actually care about equality for any of us, except to stay within parameters flexible enough to maintain the economic status quo.

Not only that, but one of the frequent world effects of massive economic disparity is violence. Poverty and violence are often very closely related. It's no coincidence that poverty tends to function as both an incubator and a catalyst for violence, crime, terrorism, and war.
Being poor, or cold, or hungry, makes it a lot easier to hate.

And people don't think working on economic equality is important?
It's a fact that we try to ignore, but improving economic disparity and poverty goes a long, long

way towards decreasing violence in any society. Economic inequality tends to exacerbate any other social tensions that might be present. It's essentially a catalyst that makes everything worse.

Often "peace by consumerism" is used as a step, but it's a temporary one and only a stopgap, because you eventually start to run into the same economic disparity problems that were never addressed in the first place.
You can't just paper over economic inequality by selling somebody a new cell phone, it won't last. You need real education and occupations and real financial stability to help bring people out of a cycle of poverty and violence. You need real economic equality.

In the rat race to get ahead, we often fail to question whether all those who work for a living might actually deserve to be equal to one another.
Or whether in a community in a world given to us all to share, perhaps no one really deserves to hoard so much more than their fellow human beings.

This is not "just how things are." It is our choice.
The rich/poor gap doesn't need to be there.
We allow it, and allow a system that supports that highly unequal relationship. If we chose to, we could make that rich/poor gap pretty small.
Economic inequality is a choice.

2. Cooperation and Competition, or, the King of the Mountain metaphor

Competition can be healthy, certainly recreationally, but in the real world, when dealing with economics, it can often be a zero-sum game. After all, this is not a sport, it's our lives.

There may be areas where competition should be used, but quality of life isn't one of them.
And rather than work together for the best quality of life for all, we have set up a system where we compete against each other for it.
Instead of sharing the resources that truly belong to all of us on a planet that we all share, we end up hoarding and then competing for them.

We have set up a system where we all fight our way upwards toward being a metaphorical King of the Mountain, when really there is a large plateau about halfway up the mountain, with plenty of room for everyone, and we could all just walk up together.
We compete for resources, when in fact, with some intelligence and organization and less hoarding, there is actually plenty to go around.
To paraphrase Mohandas Gandhi, "There is enough on the planet for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed."

Maybe our lives shouldn't be a rat race. Maybe we can do better than that together.
Competition is not the only way to motivate people to work or to be creative, and in terms of economic equality, it fails us.
Cooperation, sharing, and organization, if done well with intelligence, adaptation, and flexibility, can serve humanity much better than a rat race.

Instead of working against each other, with some winning and many more losing, it would be a more efficient use of our talents, and also our humanity, to work together.
Rather than a zero-sum game, we can shift our mode of thinking to a more cooperative, positive-sum game.

The reason we don't really have to live in a "law of the jungle" type of world is that we can choose not to. We can choose to evolve, both individually and societally.

We've had this king of the mountain paradigm for a long time, so perhaps it's time we change the paradigm.
We can keep on playing the rat race, fighting each other in this king of the mountain game...or we could all just walk up together.

3. Christianity and Economics

It's interesting how religion and economics have intersected, with most religions bending their precepts, or often completely ignoring them, in order to justify maintaining economic inequality.

It seems that the same ideals that one pays lip service to during one's holy day...simply don't apply during the other six days of the week.

In the US, Christianity as commonly practiced is one of the most obvious examples of this. It's remarkable that so many Christians have managed to support a system of massive economic inequality and at the same time claim belief in the teachings of Jesus.

A lot of Christians in this country seem to act lately as though they are a persecuted minority, but in truth, Christianity in this country largely functions not like an early pastoral church, but more like Christianity after the Roman Empire co-opted it and began to use it as a false front.

The US has a huge rich/poor gap, and yet those Christians who are often the wealthiest and most powerful claim to follow a religion that speaks primarily about equality, sharing, and unconditional love.

How can one truly "love thy neighbor as thyself" and support a system of massive inequality at the same time?

It's always interesting to hear Christians essentially say, "This is America. This is freedom. Why should we care about addressing inequality and the disparity between the have's and have not's?"

Because ironically, Jesus spent most of his time doing just that.

When the rich man asked Jesus, "What must I do?", Jesus ended with,
" 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'
At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." (NIV Mark 10:21-22)

At the first threat to his wealth, the rich man's devotion to Jesus went right out the window.

Jesus talked more about helping the poor than most things, and yet many Christians continue to support a system that guarantees there will always be a massive rich/poor gap.

"Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25:45)

So you're a Christian? Or you believe the world should remain unequal? Which is it?

Because as Jesus said, “You cannot serve both God and money.” (Luke 16:13)

4. Stock Markets

The stock market is essentially a gambling table.
It is calculated gambling, with the game rigged in favor of those with specific financial knowledge and great wealth, who always gain over time over those without it. The have's and have not's repeated again.

It's a game where, if the wealthiest investors decide that the stock price and their bank balances aren't increasing fast enough, then one of the first things companies will do to appease them is fire low to middle-income employees.

And it's not just about a system that is clearly rigged towards massive inequality. You're also basing much of an economy, and many people's savings, on something that is about as stable as an earthquake.
Does that seem wise?

5. Work life balance

We all need to eat of course, but sometimes we get so caught up in working for a living that we forget why we are here. We forget that there is more to life than spending it working like a robot day after day until we die.
It's much too often live to work, instead of work to live. And we need that balance.

Work can certainly be good...the lessons learned from it, the challenges, the community of those who work with us, the shared responsibility. And if you're passionate about how your work improves the lives of others, then work becomes even more enjoyable.

But for many of us, it's difficult not to become a slave to the grindstone sometimes. When you feel like you're working nonstop, as many people do, it often becomes difficult to develop as a human being and enjoy your life because you have so much trouble even taking a breath and looking up from the daily grindstone. It can be difficult to think about any larger issues in life, because you are so busy just trying to survive it.

In truth, in an economic sense, if we all worked together more, and smarter, we would all still work hard, but probably work much less.
But we'll never even get to that point if we don't also first try to balance, put our work in perspective, and remember that who we are and why we are here has very little to do with just punching a timecard.

6. Our Environment

We share this Earth with each other, with future generations, and with the other life on it. Life on Earth is a system. If we unsustainably exhaust a resource, or pollute a resource, then it's ruined for everyone.

Historically, the wealthiest among us were unaffected by things like pollution or the destruction of resources, because the wealthy were remote investors who could just move on, unlike the people who lived nearby and whose lives depended on those resources.

It's known as a version of the "not in my back yard" attitude, which is when we don't really care what parts of the world are polluted or exhausted or destroyed, as long as they aren't "in our back yard."
However, humanity is now beginning to realize that we are all connected more than we once thought. We're beginning to realize that things "not in my back yard" often eventually *will be* in our back yard, as destructive world actions begin to affect us all.
We're now seeing this with the environmental effects that are beginning to add up in the world, as well as the echoing effects of poverty and violence.
And as we begin to recognize our relationship with one another, we are also realizing that it is going to require a more connected, more balanced way of living with one another and with the world.

We have been wrecking the planet faster than we can clean it up. And we have to turn that around.

Endless landfills, non-biodegradable plastic everywhere, polluted oceans and rivers, deforestation, exhausted crop lands and desertification, significant climate changes, smog warnings, these are things that are affecting our water, our food, and the air we breathe. You can go to some of the most secluded ecosystems in the world and now find trash there. It may have been "not in my back yard" in the past, but that wasn't a "not" as in forever, that was just a "not" as in "not yet."
As an example of our environmental short-sightedness, just look at how we have polluted our water supply in places and limited the availability of water to people who need it. This is water, literally the lifeblood of the planet and the human body, and we are poisoning it? That is insane.

Although we have failed to recognize it in the past, we are part of an ecosystem, and our effects within that system are beginning to come back to bite us. And that will only get worse with more people and no major effort to change how we live here.

We need to be a sustainable society.
We need to commit to sustainability and renewable resources. We are an incredibly wasteful society with both our consumption and our systems of production and disposal.

There are many more sustainable ways to do things...renewable resources, organic agriculture, alternative energy choices, public transportation, recycling systems, etc. These are things we already know how to do and are constantly improving, we have just never fully made the commitment.

Take recycling, for example. The useful rule of thumb is...Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink.
Reduce consumption.
Reuse the items we already have, and improve upon a wasteful product culture of poor quality and planned obsolescence.
Recycle everything that we can, instead of producing even more non-biodegradable trash.
And Rethink how we do things, always improving upon our methods.

We need to stop being a wasteful society, as nearly everything we manufacture can be made to be reduced, reused, recycled, and rethought.
And part of that is learning better habits. None of us want to stress about the little things all the time, which is good, but when we make better habits and also have an efficient system, we don't have to stress, because something like recycling just becomes easy.

You can't have zero impact. You're here, and you have the right to be here just like anyone else. But you can have minimal impact. Take only what you need, and share the rest with those around you.
We can all move away from being hyperconsumers and instead move towards being conscious consumers of the things we choose to buy.

And moreover, we can start factoring in things like product recycling as simply part of the manufacturing cost of creating a product on this planet, as that really will be the only way to keep our planet healthy for future generations.

When it comes to our own environment, we need to finally learn to see long-term views, rather than just short-term gains.
It's important to be able to factor in the true cost of environmental impacts, and to be capable of seeing one hundred years ahead, rather than just three years ahead.
It's important to be able to take those long-term views and realize that the work we do now will save ourselves and the next generation even more difficult work in the future.
That kind of view can help us do things in smarter, more sustainable ways.
And it can help our world remain peaceful, as there has already been more than one war in the past fought over natural resources.

We don't have to choose between people and the environment, we can do right by both. And we need to, not only out of respect for other life forms, but because our own quality of life on Earth depends on the environment around us.
When it comes to sustainability, it will take time, and it's not one size fits all, as different geographic locations adapt for different circumstances, but the key word is still sustainable.
We need to be a sustainable society with a sustainable relationship with our environment.

Anything else is basically a slow suicide.

The environmental resources on the Earth may be substantial, but they are not limitless, especially when managed unsustainably.
But we're starting to realize that. We're starting to realize that we need to adapt our resource management to account for that fact, and that we need to live sustainably.
We're starting to realize it, but we have yet to fully commit to making the shift.

7. Consumerism

We all use material things, but we also need to find a better balance, both individually and as a society, so that we're not simply hyperconsumers.
When materialism or consumerism is rampant, the world becomes less of a global village, and more just a global mall.
We tend to become incredibly wasteful. We are oftentimes not questioning an economy that is full of inequality, but simply helping maintain that status quo. And we become preoccupied with acquiring things, often to the neglect of ourselves and others.

We're frequently trapped in insulated, isolated bubbles of consumerism, lacking any real community. And the actual communal spaces that we do have often only exist if they involve increasing consumption. For example, how many spaces exist in your city where you can spend time together that do not also require you to shop or be exposed to advertising?

In a typical consumer economy, a company's dream is to create a product that both dominates the market and is basically addictive, something that you keep obsessively consuming again and again and again. But as a human being, and as a spiritual being in the world, that's not such a wise idea.
But rather than focusing on developing the human community that we really could, the goal of consumerism is simply to keep producing and consuming more, always more. There is not much interest in anything other than the goal of continued product consumption. Consume, consume, consume, reproduce yourself, and then those children will in turn consume, consume, consume as well.
The type of consumer machine that's created wants your attention all the time, but doesn't care whether you ever really learn anything while you're here on Earth. Companies want to get your attention and keep your attention, and care much more about "brand awareness" than any other more meaningful kind of awareness.
So you have to ask yourself, do you really think it is healthy for human beings to base their lives on that?
Is it mentally healthy? Is it sustainable?

Has a system of hyperconsumption already made the acquisition of things more important to us than the rest of humanity?

Or should we perhaps follow Martin Luther King Jr.'s advice when he said, "We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society."

Sometimes you have to downshift to make something better.
And in order to focus more on quality over quantity, and to work towards more of a real community rather than just living in a mall, we need to work towards minimizing consumption. It would benefit us in our own state of mind as well as environmentally.

But at the moment, consumerism, or the idea that consumption is a virtue regardless of human or environmental impact, is unfortunately still prevalent.

But to start recognizing what truly matters to us, we can just ask ourselves,
"How much stuff do I actually need?"
"When I see something, is my first thought, 'Do I want to own it?' "

Necessities aside, does something really improve our quality of life? Are we deeply happier because of it?
Because it's amazing how little material goods we can be perfectly happy on. Once our basic needs are met and we are relatively comfortable, how much stuff do we really need to be happy? What are the things that actually make us happy in life?

Many people eventually find that what enriches our lives the most is our connection to our fellow human beings. And despite what advertisers tell us, our hyperconsumerism and our habit of focusing on things instead of people often hinders our relationships with the rest of humanity. Because despite the incredible wealth of human connection all around us, we often continue to live lives that revolve mostly around chasing and obtaining more things.
So it's always good to ask ourselves, "How much stuff do I really need?"

8. Advertising

One of the most common tactics for pushing consumerism on humanity is the use of sex and death, or fear and desire, in advertising.

When dealing with a construct, especially one like advertising, it's important to be able to read subtext, to sense undertones, and to recognize meaning.
So then we can look at the images, the symbols, and the language that are used, and pay attention to what messages are really being sent. And sometimes it's alright, but oftentimes the messages are highly manipulative.
And it's not really that subliminal or hidden, it's pretty easy to see, you can just look back through past ads, and you'll start to see the patterns easily. Sex and death, sex and death, fear and desire, over and over and over again, consume, reproduce, die, consume, reproduce, die. And nothing is actually there by accident in advertising, everything is specifically chosen to have an effect. So most ads are specifically designed to use fear or desire in order to push consumption.

But we don't have to just be pushed and pulled along by consumer culture.
We can choose to be aware, to make our own choices, and to not let others manipulate us so much by our fears or desires.

9. Money in Politics

No one should be able to buy public policy.
Money itself isn't speech. Otherwise, those who have more of it will always have more of a voice in government than those who have less.
Your voice and your votes are speech partly because we all have the same amount.
We have to get the money out of politics.

10. Economic Systems

Humanity is evolving to recognize equality where we had not previously seen it (race, gender, sexuality, etc.). So it makes sense that we would also begin to recognize a system of economic inequality as being a poor choice in a shared world of equal human beings.

Since human beings are essentially equal, inequality is not "natural," but simply a product of a system that we choose to allow. And it's a system that, with patience and intelligence, we can change to better match who we are, and who we choose to be.

Once past the necessities, and a certain amount of comfort, wealth becomes superfluous for most people when it comes to happiness. And yet humanity doesn't seem to learn that lesson, we just continue with this king of the mountain system while many people never even meet necessities, much less comfort.
We need to design a better system than this, one where economic equality is actually a goal.

What particular economic systems we end up choosing to balance these issues doesn't matter as much as that we actually improve upon the system that we have been using. Because the system we have been using has often revolved around self-interest, greed, and overconsumption, and it has zero interest in economic equality. And we can do better than that.

We have been dealing with the symptoms of economic inequality in this country for a long time, but we have never really focused on whether the system should actually address equality, or allow hoarding.

The false idea that we are so alone and separate from our fellow human beings has echoed in how we have constructed our economy. But maybe an economy that is based strictly on self-interest is not the best model for human beings to live together in a shared world?

Remember, an economic system is a construct. It's not like the Earth was formed, and it was here. We choose it.

And we can choose to have a society of equality.

[Economic Systems shift]

There are a lot of brilliant people in the world, who have done amazing things over the years. Why have we never really put 100 brilliant people (economists, games theorists, relevant professionals, etc.) in a room for six months to figure out the best ways to develop economic systems that actually support equality?

Why have we never really done that?
We can split the atom, develop quantum computing, and put a robot on other planets, but we can't design a system of economic equality? That's ridiculous.
The answer is that up until now, we just haven't really cared enough to bother.
We've just never made that commitment to changing the status quo and finding a way to make our economic systems more equal.

To make that kind of shift, you have to make intelligent, flexible, organized, adaptive decisions. It's a challenging task, but we have a lot of brilliant minds and we are a highly capable society. We're perfectly capable of working out the best ways to shift towards a more balanced system.

We can't allow ourselves to be mystified by the math, because there are always solutions, and often more than one. Systems may get more complex as things scale and you add variables, but the basic forms of the equations are still the same (x number of people, y amount of resources, z amount of goods, services, etc.), and we have some brilliant people in the world who can help derive good solutions that actually work for *all of us*.

One key point is learning how to better balance economic equality with individual freedom. That balance of community and individual, independence but also interdependence, is very important.
And the two aren't mutually exclusive, it is a relationship.

Experiments in communism have tended to overcompensate in one direction, while experiments in capitalism have tended to overcompensate in the other direction.

But it's an important balance that we need to work towards...to be different, free, and also equal. We're not all alike, which is certainly wonderful, but shouldn't we all be equal?
Don't we all deserve a sustainable system that benefits all, equally?

One problem is that countries aren't always learning from each other.
Each country has things they do well and things they don't do well, both good decisions and mistakes.
Like people, countries are imperfect, but they can improve.
The US, for example, has some wonderful ideals in its founding documents, but that founding itself was also built upon the invasion and genocide of an indigenous people. And the Constitution at one point had the institution of slavery enshrined in it. So the idea that countries and systems can't and don't need to evolve is nonsense.

There is an economic spectrum around the world, with different systems in different places, and that's certainly fine. Things don't have to be the same.
Most countries experimenting with communism today are still failing miserably at individual

freedoms, and most countries experimenting with capitalism have individual freedoms but barely give a damn about economic equality except to keep it from dropping so low that the status quo is affected. And some other countries are experimenting with hybrid systems somewhere in between to try to find the right balance.

But regardless, improving or shifting any economic system towards being an equality-balanced economic system is a process. It takes steps. It is gradual, and takes place over time.
Like any good process, you don't throw out the good with the bad, but continue to make progress towards your goal. You improve what you have, while recognizing its flaws, and gradually shift towards better systems/solutions. You may move in a process of steps over time, but you continue to move, and gradually you find a way that works for you and accomplishes your goals.

We often think of reasons why we shouldn't do something, because it's difficult, instead of thinking of the reasons why we should do something, because it's important.

If we believe human beings are essentially equal, and that we share this planet together, then how is a system of massive economic inequality and hoarding okay?

We often teach children to share with one another, but as adults, we support a system where we do the exact opposite of what we teach.
We can do better.
We can live up to our own beliefs.

We choose our systems.
And we can choose to shift towards more equality-balanced economic systems that better represent who we are as equal human beings living together on a shared planet.

Part 3 - Violence

1. Eye for an Eye

An “eye for an eye” does not work.

Are there consequences to actions? Yes. But retribution and revenge only continue the cycle of violence.

We often feel righteous in our anger, and sometimes we have just cause, but sometimes so does the other side, and when everyone feels angry and righteous and violent, what’s the result? “That old law about ‘an eye for an eye’ leaves everybody blind,” as Martin Luther King Jr. said.

We have even had entire wars drag on for years, as both sides sought retributive justice like a tragically lethal game of “Got you last!”

And frequently, people have been in danger of becoming just like the monster they are trying to slay, usually around the same time civilians start being killed.
People have often relied on the excuse that something is just “a means to an end,” but you have to be very careful with that, because a lot of truly horrific crimes have been done in the name of that excuse.
And what we don’t realize is that oftentimes, the means is the end. The means matters.

In many conflicts, both sides end up terrorizing each other, and yet both sides feel they are defending themselves as well. And often there are extremists wielding influence to continue the violence on both sides.

It is difficult to come together while firing guns at each other. It can be awfully hard for people to put down their gun and think clearly when they’re being shot at. But occasionally, that is exactly what is needed.
Because otherwise, the “We can’t hold our fire unless they hold their fire” mentality creates an endless cycle of war.
If each side is determined on firing the last bullet, as an eye for an eye, then the fighting simply never stops.

2. Violence reinforcing itself

Humanity's continued use of violence sustains the idea that it is the way to solve problems.
We keep reinforcing its hold on us.
And so we fall, once again, into the trap of continuing the cycle.

The idea of a "violent solution" is one of the world's most deceptive falsehoods.
Even when we think we have solved a problem with it, besides the immediate losses of life and residual side effects that will likely resurface later in a conflict, we have also added to humanity's overall belief in it as a "solution," and thus added to the continuation of the cycle.
We help guarantee future conflicts will repeat the same process based on that belief that violence "works."
And so humanity's cycle of violence will continue. Now reinforced by one more act.

Sometimes violence may be necessary as a very last resort for self-defense (see the Use of Force chapter), but that would only be after exhausting nonviolent methods, because when we are practicing Nonviolence, there are always a thousand better ways to resolve a problem before we ever get to violence.
But the vast majority of the time, we never take those steps.
Because if humanity actually understood and practiced Nonviolence, then violence would be rare, rather than commonplace.

Violence is a last resort stopgap at best.
It's like patching holes in a dam with chewing gum. It may work for the short-term, maybe, but long-term, it fails us.
And our belief that it works fine actually increases our problems, as we continue using that same method to "fix" problems.
Whereas, Nonviolence is the patch that can actually repair the rift.

"Violence begets violence," as Martin Luther King Jr. said.
It both continues the cycle, and adds to it. Because violence reinforces the idea that it is the only way to an outcome, even though it's often not even close to the best or even a good outcome.

Whereas well-practiced Nonviolence gets better outcomes and also teaches us lessons about violence itself.
But when we persist in being violent, we learn nothing about the nature of violence itself, which is one of the main reasons we are here.

Violence typically results in... 1) damage to the "other" human being, 2) damage to the self (including psychologically), and 3) damage to all of us by continuing to reinforce the cycle of violence.
Whereas, Nonviolence typically reverses those 3 things.

Attempts at peace through violence, attempts at justice through wielding injustice, often have effects that echo down the line and which can be much more damaging in the long run in helping sustain a conflict rather than end it.

Using violence to create a less violent society tends to simply repeat the cycle over time, because the essential lessons of Nonviolence have gone unlearned.
It reinforces the idea of a violent solution being a real long-term solution rather than simply a deferment of the issue of violence and a continuation of the cycle.

It reinforces for everyone, friend and enemy alike, that the way to "resolve" a conflict is with violence.
And so the cycle, and the belief in the value of that cycle, just continues.

We think a situation has been "solved" with violence, but the real cycle just continues to roll on under the surface...now slightly stronger.

And the way to gradually break that cycle lies on another path.

A big part of the problem is process.
A return to the status quo, from the wrong method, never really solves the inherent problem, and yet it reinforces that method again.

Machiavelli was wrong, the end does *not* justify the means usually...the process matters.
As much, if not more than, the outcome. In many ways, it *is* the outcome.
Because the means is what reinforces the cycle or not.

Once we see that violence reinforces violence, we have to ask ourselves, do we want that cycle to *ever* end?

We keep reinforcing the wrong thing, the thing that actually does the most damage to us throughout human history. So instead of always trying to use a solution that can never actually be a solution, perhaps we ought to try something different?
There are better ways to solve problems.

It's time to commit to charting a different course for humanity.

3. The Moment of violence

When a situation feels like it's building towards violence, it's so important that we take a moment to stop and reflect, and ask ourselves and each other, "Do we really have to do this?"

Because there is almost always a better way.

But often we get caught up in the adrenaline and the momentum, and we fail to stop and take that moment.

But we are not mindless animals.
Think before you act.
Take a breath, and don't let your body or your emotional reactions control you.
Find that inner calm, and compassion, let that be your center, and work from there.
Relax. Breathe.
Control the desire to lash out in anger.
Sometimes it's as simple as taking a breath and counting to ten.
And as you count, let the anger and aggression pass from you like a wave...

It also helps to think about what the consequences of violence instead of Nonviolence would be...in the moments after...in the next day...in the next year.
We often realize that it's better to let our pride take a slight hit, then to have to deal with the long-term consequences of violence.

So breathe, settle...and see the human spirit in the person across from you.
And realize that it's always better to live and let live if possible.

Instead of letting things escalate, we have to learn to recognize our emotions and their effects on us...our anger, our fear, etc. Because then we can manage those emotions better, and move on to making wise decisions.

So it becomes a moment of reflection, rather than just a moment of reflex.

Because if we are calm and wise, a better way can be found in pretty much any conflict.

A lot of times, there is so much imaginary violence going on in our minds, that we build up tension and create a fight in our minds long before any fight occurs in reality.
And yet, that's all in the mind.
If, instead of being led around by our ego's little "fighting fantasies," we settle ourselves within and connect with our own wise heart, then that fight in reality most likely never needs to occur.

Sometimes, visualizing or playing things out in our heads can be useful. It can be a way to realize

consequences and keep ourselves from making bad choices. But sometimes, we let our minds work against us and stir us up towards a fight, when we never actually needed to be in one.

And sometimes humanity makes similar mistakes on a large-scale, political level. We let our "collective momentum" carry entire countries into fights which we never really needed to have. It almost becomes a case of, "Well, we've all been preparing for a war and expecting it, so I guess we're just going to have to fight now." It becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, instead of just stepping back from the madness, seeing that there is another way, and that "We don't actually have to do this."

In the madness of violence, we often fail to simply stop and ask, "Do we really need to be doing this?"
We're a human family...just scrabbling in the dirt and killing one another...and for what?

A big part of Nonviolence is awakening the person to which you are opposed.

Gandhi, King, Jesus, all knew the simple truth that...

My enemy is my friend, he just does not know it yet.
My enemy is my brother, he just does not know it yet.

When you see someone clearly, when you see their shared humanity and shared divinity, it makes it that much easier to commit to Nonviolence to reach them, because you can see that they are your brother, long separated.

And those transcendent moments of humanity between enemies that have happened before in history tell us that we don't need to be doing this stuff. We don't have to be lured into the delusional insanity and absurdity of violence.
Humanity doesn't have to be duped into thinking we need to kill our own brother.

Violence is the last, and worst, way to attempt to resolve a conflict. There is always a better way if you know how to look.

There are always ways to be found to de-escalate situations.
Be aware, be wise, but also be able to reach across that plane, and connect with someone on that most human level.
Those are the types of moments that help end conflicts.

And what we expect about someone can sometimes affect their behavior as well. If you see someone with anger or mistrust and fear, it is sometimes easier for them to go ahead and be so. If you see them with love and respect and dignity, it often becomes harder for them as a human

being to betray that trust. You often help open the door to a common level of humanity by how you interact with someone.

One of the hallmarks of maturity is learning to replace our rashness, anger, and adrenaline with love and wisdom.
But sometimes it's a lot easier to fight an external enemy than to fight those more important battles within. So sometimes it might seem easier to say, "Whatever, let's just fight," instead of doing the harder, slower work of working through and resolving a conflict.
But besides the consequences, the problem is also that the person you're fighting with is your family too, and your actions also help determine whether humanity ever learns or not, so a nonviolent conflict resolution *is* very much worth the effort.

With enough intelligence, courage, and creativity, there's pretty much always a better way to be found, if you have the heart and mind to find it.
But we all have to have that important ability, in violent conflict, to look people in the face and say, "What are we doing? This is madness. Let's step back from this madness together."

To peace.

4. Love and Nonviolence as strength

To live with heart doesn't make you weak, but quite the opposite, it makes you strong.

To love not just oneself, but others...and not even just one's friends, but one's "enemies" as well, requires great strength.
And Nonviolence is that strength in action.

Nonviolence is not used out of fear, but out of strength and love.
Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr....these people were no cowards.

They were both human beings who had a huge heart and an incredibly tough will.
They refused to quit pushing for positive social change, but they also refused to let that struggle devolve and get sidetracked into violence.
They never threw a punch or fired a bullet, and yet they were incredibly strong.

Nonviolence requires as much heroic courage as violence, and often more so. Many can tell you that it is often much harder to stand firm in the face of violence or the threat of violence than it is to lash out at someone.

But it's important to realize that Nonviolence is not passive. It is active. It is proactive actually. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and those who changed the world during those movements were anything but passive.

Nonviolence also does not preclude the ability to say no. In fact, Nonviolence demands that you have that ability. Non-cooperation, civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance...these require a firm, resolved resistance.

And they require an equally firm commitment that we will not cooperate in the activity that continually destroys us all...violence.

To practice Nonviolence, one has to be both strong and flexible.
One has to be firm without being angry or cold, but instead remain compassionate.
Nonviolence requires determination, tenacity, and commitment.
As was said previously, it is not used out of fear, but out of strength and love. We may feel fear, but often when we practice Nonviolence, something overrides our fear and calms us, because what we are doing feels right. It just feels like what we are supposed to be doing.

Nonviolence requires both strength and bravery.
The Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a good example of someone who realized Nonviolence was not a weapon of the weak, but of the strong. He raised over 100,000 nonviolent warriors, and he, along with Gandhi, were together greatly feared by the British Empire. The

British Empire at the time knew how to deal with men with guns, and were quite used to that. But men without guns...indomitable spiritual beings with relentless persistence...that's a whole different type of problem.

Gandhi often used the term satyagraha ("truth force" or "soul force") when talking about Nonviolence. He knew that, when Nonviolence is well practiced and committed, people really begin to have difficulty avoiding the truth.
The Civil Rights Movement in the US was an excellent example of that.

The issues at hand and one's reactions can no longer be hidden behind the act of self-defense, because there is no violent war to be waged, no bullets to dodge, or attacks to retaliate against. There are only human beings standing in front of you simply asking you to see.
And so people, without that veil of a fight to hide behind, begin to see and feel the truth of something.
And real change begins to happen.

5. Empathy

One of the things we often fail to do is empathize enough.

Being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes, to see things from their perspective, is so important. You don't necessarily have to agree with or condone all of their choices, but to have a deep understanding of where someone is coming from is so essential, especially for conflict negotiation.

In conflicts, we are often polarized, and we become so quick to dehumanize the other side, rather than empathize with them at all.

When we close our minds off like that, and deny our ability to see an opponent's humanity, then it becomes difficult to meet in the middle at all.

But it's important to be able to see someone on the other side of a conflict and recognize that, "Had I been born in different circumstances, this person could have been me."

When you can do that, when you really see a human brother on the other side of the divide...you may not agree with all of their choices, or stop protecting yourself from those choices, but you are much more likely to be able to bridge the gap between you to find peaceful coexistence.

In larger conflicts, there are often loved ones lost on both sides, but we have to eventually learn to forgive and let go of the anger, otherwise the conflict never ends.

Because human beings weren't born hating one another.
We are actually all a human family, just separated by illusions.

And when we are no longer misguided by hatred, then we begin to see that shared humanity. And things begin to improve.
We start to empathize and actually work together. And we often find there is not as much real conflict as we thought, and what conflict there is, can be greatly improved.

But that can't begin to happen until we learn to empathize...to see not just differences but also similarities, and to see our shared humanity.
We can't meet in the middle until we really learn to understand our human brother's point of view.

6. To love everyone as family.

We often have a dehumanizing disconnect when we see the troubles of others. If they are not our own family or friends, we often don't ask anything of ourselves to help the situation.
Our empathy becomes limited, and whatever they might going through becomes acceptable to us.

We need to learn to care about *everyone* the same way we care about our own family.
To develop that love for all human beings.

And it doesn't mean we love our family any less, we just don't place them over and above the entire rest of humanity.

It's often easy to love those closest to you, but it's a lot more difficult to love those you don't know as well, and that is a much better test of your compassion.
And that test even increases to its zenith when you choose to love someone who might be seen as an "enemy."

When you care about a fellow human being as you would care about a family member or a good friend, it becomes easier to love them despite their offenses against you.
And that doesn't mean one needs to be naive or unwise, or spend all of their time with someone they find disagreeable, it simply means that you love someone as a human being despite offenses or disagreements.

As Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:43-44)

When we begin to see that it is not just about those closest to us, not just "us" versus "them," but that all of humanity is essentially a family, then we begin to realize that all wars really are brother fighting brother.

And we can begin to refuse to let violence and hatred continue to push us away from one another.

When you see that all of humanity is essentially your family, it is a huge step into a higher level of compassion.

As we begin to see humanity's connection to one another, we realize that our prejudices mostly come down to some cultural differences and maybe a couple of insignificant physical differences like skin pigment.
Humanity is wonderfully diverse. But it's also important to remember that overall, we're a lot more alike than we are different.

And when it comes to overcoming prejudices against one another, whether they are based on

race, sexuality, religion, etc., a lot of the time a lack of social integration is a huge part of the problem.

We are often so separated from one another by culture, ethnic group, wealth, geography, etc. that we have little interaction with the "other." Misunderstanding, dislike, fear, and hatred all develop much easier when we are socially isolated from one another in that way.

When we've never really made a friend on the "other" side of that imaginary fence, when we've never really spent time with someone just as a fellow human being and seen that shared humanity, then it becomes a lot easier to maintain a prejudice.
Social integration and interaction help open the door to understanding.

It's a lot tougher to dislike someone for being different once you see them as a friend.

Don't inherit the prejudices of those who came before you.
Our minds sometimes imprison our hearts, and delude us into not caring for one another.

But when people of difference step across that fear boundary, make eye contact, and speak to one another as friends...that is an act of world peace.

7. Nonviolence and religion

It is discouraging to see how many Christians choose not to practice Nonviolence.

There are so many who claim to believe in Jesus, yet are nowhere to be seen on the front lines of Nonviolence, only the front lines of violence.
And they may be able to cite one or two anomalous lines in support of violence, but those lines go against the overwhelming majority of what Jesus spent his lifetime teaching.

Jesus's central teachings revolved around Nonviolence and an epic depth of compassion for all human beings.
And yet there are so many Christians who continue to participate in and sustain violence.
All while ignoring Jesus's message.

And this goes for other religions as well.
Those who claim that Islam is a religion of peace, or that Judaism, or Buddhism, or Hinduism are religions of peace, must therefore also prove it.

And there are some who do.
Many practitioners of Islam understand that the real battle is within, not without. Ghaffar Khan was one such person.
Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. was Christian, and Mahatma Gandhi was Hindu.
Khan, King, Gandhi...these types of people were deeply committed to their individual faiths, and yet realized that Nonviolence was actually central to those faiths.

8. Ideas not people

Both Gandhi and King understood and taught us that the way to human progress was in fighting ideas, not people.
And it's a very important lesson for us to remember.
We are all, every one of us, in this together.

We have to be careful sometimes, as often we don't really see human beings anymore, because we are so busy seeing everything solely through the lens of the issue that we are concerned about.

And we certainly have to work through disagreements, misunderstandings, and injustice...but we can't let those things tear humanity apart in the meantime.
It's a journey for all of us. And we won't get anywhere, if not together.

But when we commit to fighting ideas, not people, it changes the nature of a conflict.
We realize that it is the problem that is our real enemy, not each other.

When we have a desire for communication and dialogue that is about opening up and creating a real mutual understanding, not about attack, then it tends to make dialogues much more productive. It creates the potential for dialogues that are not about being offensive or defensive, not about "winning," but about both sides reaching a real understanding.
It also helps create an environment where people feel like they can change without feeling "defeated."

Gandhi was a good example of someone who had real empathy and respect for an "adversary" as a human being. For sure, he was as tough as nails and deeply committed to his cause, but he was also just as committed to the humanity of his adversaries.
He would even defend his own opponents when they were attacked with violence or unfairness, confirming his respect and love for them as human beings, and often earning their respect in the process.

One of the results of a serious nonviolent commitment is that sometimes you have to show people the truth.
Nonviolence often helps us turn a mirror on ourselves, so we can realize what we are doing to one another.

The good in most people far outweighs the bad, and there are many, many more good people than bad. But sometimes, we are blinded by emotions, ego, self-interest, ideas, constructs, systems, etc., and you just have to show people an injustice that's going on.
You have to awaken them some, and then connect with them.
We sometimes forget that second part, the connection part, but it's important. Our journey in this

world is not about human retribution, it's about human understanding.

And so it's important to remember to fight ideas, not people.

9. Discussion

One of the most important skills in maintaining peace is the ability to discuss, even argue, yet still be able to live and laugh with one another.

When you have the ability to argue and yet still truly love the other person as a human being, then maybe not all but much that seemed unmovably important begins to lose its power over both of you.

When we think through and discuss problems with others, it helps to be quick to laugh, slow to anger, and with a great deal of patience, compassion, and empathy.
We can have discussions with an open mind, and maybe we change our mind on some things and maybe not on others, but either way, we still always recognize our human brother or sister sitting across from us at the table.

In order to find a way through any sustained conflict, it's essential that we be able to see both sides. We need to empathize and be able to see where someone is coming from.
It's also important to have a real conversation, instead of just a power struggle, and to talk with someone, rather than at them. And sometimes, when passions rise, we need to listen to what someone is saying, rather than how they are saying it.

And saying no is important sometimes too, as long as we're saying it with an open heart and a wise mind.
But seeking a way to "get to yes," with that same open heart and wise mind, to find ways through a situation, is even more important.
There is often not one way, but many ways, to accomplish a goal.

And there is of course complexity in conflicts, but there is often some level of simplicity at heart as well. So it helps to be knowledgeable of the complexity surrounding a conflict, but also be able to see through to the heart of the matter at times.
And in conflict resolution, it helps to not only look at symptoms, but also at the root causes of problems. Often we don't really get to the root of our problems, and the things we blame as causes, are in fact symptoms. So a system-wide view of problems is always important.

Gandhi was an excellent model in the area of conflict resolution. Besides epic patience, one of the tenets that helped him was that he was alright with compromising on most of the smaller details of the conflict resolution process, but he would not compromise on his core human principles...his belief in Nonviolence, his belief in the right of a people to self-determination, etc.
And those types of human principles are understandable across the world, regardless of affiliation.
And most importantly, Gandhi knew that, in the midst of conflict, Nonviolence was the only way to real lasting human progress and peaceful coexistence.

10. Zero-Sum Games

We have been treating most of our conflict interactions like a zero-sum game. One side wins, one side loses. Us versus them.

We have failed to fully realize that we are all in this together, and that we could be approaching our interactions as more of a positive-sum game.
As an alternative to the win/loss dichotomy, a positive-sum game means that each side can come out of the process with some type of win.

And we need a more cooperative rather than adversarial system. Negotiation, compromise, give and take, cooperation, together we have a shared fate as humanity, and the ways in which we interact should reflect that.

We also need to think broader about what is a "win," and what can work for both sides. Oftentimes, it's not an "either/or" situation, but a "both/and" situation. There is often a third way, and usually many more ways than that.

A negotiation is not for me to "win," or you to "lose," but for us to find a way that we can both win together.

11. The status quo and current conventional wisdom

If the status quo, or conventional wisdom, were really so wise, then the world would already be a lot better off than it is.
But conventional wisdom is often not so wise at all, and typically has not been doing such a great job of making the world a better place.
Conventional wisdom may not always be wrong, but it can be wrong quite often, so like anything, we should always take it with a grain of salt.
Phrases like “that’s just how the world works” or “that’s just the way things are” should remind us of the flawed arguments often found in conventional wisdom.

When any paradigm shift is involved, you have to remember that sometimes there is a lot invested in the previous paradigm and in keeping things the way they are.

And also, when people say, “It’ll never happen,” their belief in that phrase is often exactly the reason that things stay the same.
Just because something is a certain way now, does that mean it always has to be?

We, every day, create the world through our shared choices.
And thus, we can always choose to create a different one.

12. History

When studying Nonviolence, it's also useful to look at wars and conflicts fought in the past and see if there are other ways one can think of, extremely difficult though they might have been, that might have resulted in less violence and loss of life overall.

The Revolutionary War is one example to look at for different possible outcomes.
The colonists had a whole lot of economic leverage at the time. Protests, boycotts, and the use of economic power were very legitimate options for them, and those methods were utilized very successfully leading up to the war.
So the choices were never just violent resistance or martyrdom. There was always a window where other nonviolent options were available to great effect.
In the end, once troops landed, we chose to meet violence with violence, but there very well may have been better options.

That possibility becomes even more interesting when you think about how it might have been different to have a country founded not on a violent uprising, but on a nonviolent one.
How might our current culture of violence have changed as a result?
Because although there is certainly greatness in this country, don't forget that we built much of it following some truly terrible actions.
There's no denying that the United States was created by the killing and displacement of an entire native population, the brutal enslavement of another people from across the sea, and the killing of each other in a lengthy civil war.
So...not the best start.
We didn't exactly build this country on a culture of Nonviolence.
We built it on a culture of violence.
And that continues to affect us to this day.

America has done some great things, but we have also continued to make far from perfect choices.
Which is true of most countries in the world. We're learning, but it's slow going, and we make it more difficult than it has to be.
And our cultural embrace of violence is the primary reason for that.

In contrast to the American Revolution, Gandhi helped India throw off their colonial rulers without ever firing a single bullet.
The American colonists might have been able to do the same. We certainly had a leadership that was committed and intelligent enough to pull it off. But we chose not to. Perhaps we just hadn't yet had a Gandhi to show us how.

As for India, do we really think it would have been better for them to start a violent revolutionary war with England? Versus the way Gandhi did it through Nonviolence?
How might the casualty rates and outcomes have changed?

Or in the 1960's, for example, would it have been better for King to start a violent race war in the American South? Versus the way he accomplished things with Nonviolence?
How well would a race war have gone?

And both of those environments were fraught with violence. Indians faced brutal massacres of state violence. And African-Americans in the American South faced terrorism from the KKK as well as extreme violence from the State.

But in both cases, Nonviolence gradually changed the world.

Nonviolence is a process, with its own hard losses at times, but it's far, far worth it versus the nightmarish alternative.

When looking at other violent events that might have turned out differently, World War II and Nazi Germany is an interesting example.
Because later on, it indeed became such a polarized conflict of world domination, cruelty, and madness, that there were very few options other than to use violence in self-defense.
But early on in the conflict's build-up, there actually were other options for changing the course of history.
Although they were few, there actually were successful examples of nonviolent actions within Germany.
And those were the ones that worried the Nazis the most, because the Nazis were just as fearful of dissenting public opinion as any other oppressive regime.

The most notable example was the Rosenstrasse Protest in Berlin in 1943, when non-Jewish German women protested the deportation of their Jewish husbands and family members.
The women protested. The Nazis backed down. And the Jewish men remained.
And there were a few other examples, such as the Catholic protests in 1941 against the Nazi euthanasia program. The Catholic protests began to really build up steam and influence, and again, Hitler and the Nazis bent to protest and public opinion. And so they had to take their program underground, for fear of public sentiment.
So there were indeed examples of effective nonviolent protest in Nazi Germany. It's not that it wasn't possible to combat the Nazis with nonviolent action, it just was rarely done.

And so it never built. Those who wanted to publicly resist the Nazis never strategically pulled it together or changed enough minds among the non-Jewish German population. And so a movement never built, and German soldiers were never forced to face that choice of whether or not to gun down large segments of their own people, united in opposition.
Jews at the time were largely viewed as separate, a view stoked by hate and greed, so it would probably have had to be non-Jewish Germans that made a stand. And few did.
To paraphrase Martin Niemoller, "...then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew...and eventually, they came for me, and there was no one left to speak."

There was not really an effective pushback as the Nazis were consolidating power and control, but imagine if, early on, large nonviolent opposition had started. Imagine sustained Nonviolence done against Hitler in ‘33, instead of say, ‘43. How might things have changed?
Hitler may have been quite the egomaniacal lunatic, but if a movement had an effect on the majority of society, things would begin to shift around him, and you just never know.
But instead, by the mid-40's, so much power and control had been set up, and the body count had risen so high, that it was basically too late to stop the war machine.
So yes, the German population at that time failed us all on a deeply human level, and the world paid the price for it. Including six million Jewish people who paid the dearest price for it.
But the potential was there. There were glimmers that showed that the regime was actually very susceptible to public opinion, and if the public ever woke up, the regime could fall. Instead, that didn’t happen, and the world was left with little choice but self-defense.

World War II is an interesting, if extreme, case.
Trying to stop a state war machine already in full steam based on an ideology of world domination and genocide with a convinced population, is a nearly impossible task.
But most situations and most conflicts are not like that.
Most conflicts can be addressed with Nonviolence long before things have a chance to escalate, and often after escalation as well.

Other good historical examples of largely nonviolent movements, besides those mentioned earlier, include those like the People Power Revolution in the Philippines that ended the dictatorship there in the 1980's. It was a movement that was more organized and better implemented than the later Tiananmen Square protest. They used a combination of work stoppages, protests, and nonviolent resistance. There were people linking arms in front of tanks, and even befriending the dictatorship’s tank drivers, thereby defeating ideas not people.

Other similar nonviolent movements which were also hugely successful include the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, as well as the majority of the ‘89-‘90 Revolutions, to include the fall of the Berlin Wall.

But it’s a process.
The more recent Arab Spring protest movements had some successes, but also stalled and went underground in many countries.
So, it’s a process. We’re learning. We’re learning how to change the world without destroying it.

Recently, other nonviolent protest movements in the US, Europe, and South America have had success in awakening the people in those countries to social justice issues and demanding government accountability.
So we are still making progress.

And an important question to ask ourselves is, how could a committed and sustained culture of Nonviolence change the atmosphere in each of our countries?
And in the world?

History has lessons for us. Lessons that we hope we will never have to learn again, and yet we always do.
As they say, learn from your history, otherwise you're bound to repeat it.

The true madness of violence is the lesson that we have always failed to learn. And so it has remained humanity's most damaging cycle.
And until we learn to break that cycle of violence, it will remain difficult for us to mature as a society.

There are a lot of examples in history of people saying, "Oh, that will never happen. That's just the way things are."
But just because something has existed, doesn't mean it has to continue. It is always a choice.
And humanity's behavior is always a choice.

As someone once said, "War is inevitable only as long as we believe it is inevitable."

The point about history is, you're always writing a new one.
And people always say that something can't be done...until one day it is.

It is a process, no doubt. It takes steps.
But given enough time and energy, anything is possible.
And if something can be done, even for just a certain period of time in a certain place, then it can still be done. It's just a matter of making it sustainable.

That first step in doing anything has always been simply believing that it is possible.
It's the people who believe things are possible that end up doing them, and everyone else jumps on board later.
How many people do you think told King or Gandhi that it could never be done? That there was simply too much violence, brutality, hatred, prejudice, history, power, etc. to overcome?

We need to learn from history, but it's also important to remember that history can be selective. For example, history often records our acts of inhumanity but forgets our acts of humanity, both big and small. It often records the clashes and conflicts that happened, but tends to ignore those that were avoided. And so you tend to get a view of the world that highlights war to the neglect of peace, and highlights violence to the neglect of Nonviolence, much like television news.

Most wars last for years, and don't accomplish much that couldn't have been accomplished in much better ways with much less loss of life.
Although people have been imprisoned or killed in nonviolent conflicts on occasion, that number is fractional compared to the massive number of people imprisoned or killed in violent conflicts.
And even in events where Nonviolence was not used as effectively as it could have been, that is

again fractional compared to history's long list of military failures and the failure of violence as a whole to solve conflicts.

Nonviolence has consistently been underestimated and ignored in history, especially all of the smaller acts of humanity that change conflicts, and so we are always amazed when we see it work. The American Civil Rights Movement and Gandhi's Indian Independence Movement were great examples of that.

We have to learn from our history, otherwise we will just repeat it.
We have to learn to see long-term, and to see the destructive cycles and patterns of violence that we have been repeating over time.
We have to do better.

There may be extreme examples when there is no other choice but violence, but it's rare, and there are so many other options along the way that we have simply not been utilizing.
We have never fully realized the power of using our humanity instead of our inhumanity to solve conflict.
We need to commit to Nonviolence as a way to break the cycle of violence, and as a way to seek and sustain peace.

13. Use of Force Scale

When assessing the use of force when facing violence, the primary factors are...

1) The amount of Force necessary to stop violence.
And,
2) The amount of Time we have to respond to violence.

If we can use a lower force level, or we have more time to respond, then conflicts can be kept at very low levels of violence.

If we have to use a higher force level, often because we have very little time to respond, like in an emergency self-defense situation, then conflicts can escalate quickly and dangerously.

So the first factor is the amount of Force necessary.
And that is a key factor, because humanity's understanding of how much force is necessary has typically been mistaken, often due to our lack of understanding about the power of Nonviolence as a force.

The second factor is Time, and it is usually most applicable when at a higher force level.
But even with a higher force level, if you have more time to respond, you can work to bring the necessary force level down through Nonviolence. In other words, with more time, that increases your ability to de-escalate a situation using Nonviolence.

When practiced properly (organized, disciplined, focused), Nonviolence works much better than violence would in nearly every situation, especially when we step in early.
Violence should actually rarely be needed, which we will someday learn. In the meantime, our resulting Use of Force can be categorized as follows...

1) Nonviolent force
(And there is a range of methods within this category, as Gandhi exemplified.)
2) Nonlethal force
3) Lethal force
(Rarely necessary, a last resort in extreme situations, and temporary, because then you move right back to 1, always seeking to de-escalate rather than continue escalating.)

Level 1 (Nonviolence) can resolve most situations, or occasionally level 2 (Nonlethal force), but level 3 (Lethal force) should be rare. It is the last resort you never want to have to use, so you work and work and work at level 1, and maybe use level 2 if you have to, and only use level 3 as a very last resort to save immediate lives.

In the use of force, we always start with the lowest level (it's a rare emergency situation that we wouldn't). We then seek to maintain that level. And if force is ever increased, we always seek to

return to that lowest level afterwards. Nonviolence is both the beginning and the end of what we strive for.
Because if we are *ever* going to change things, then we *have* to shift humanity's heavy emphasis from violence over to Nonviolence.
In the past, in terms of the ratio of effort put into it, we put the most time, energy, and effort into Lethal force (level 3, LF), some effort into Nonlethal force (level 2, NLF), and very little effort into Nonviolence (level 1, NV). But we need to *reverse that ratio.*

So, instead of our resulting Use of Force Scale looking like this...

|-------|--------------|---|
1(NV) 2(NLF) 3 (Lethal force)

We need the Use of Force Scale to look more like this...

|---|--------------|-------|
1 (Nonviolence) 2(NLF) 3(LF)

And it's important to remember that there is so much in history that was justified by self-defense, but was actually not. Things that were not a last resort, not an emergency response, and yet violence was still used long before it was necessary, because we didn't have the wisdom or foresight to put in the difficult work of Nonviolence. We didn't want to work to develop the understanding, the communication, the creative thinking, the sustained organization. Instead of really putting that big effort into Nonviolence, it was simpler to just fight, and thus continue the cycle that has plagued humanity ever since we've been here.
When was the last time a group of people, or a country, attempted a smart, organized, sustained, nonviolent movement, before giving up and resorting to violence?
If you can't think of a really strong example for a given violent conflict, then guess what...by definition, violence wasn't the last resort when it was used in that conflict.

Often the things we claim were necessary for self-defense, or survival, or as a last resort, were not, and there were a dozen other paths we could have taken first to alleviate the conflict, but we let our fear or aggression get the best of us.
There are certainly exceptions. Situations that are essentially emergencies, where there is a real threat to life and little time in which to respond. Terrorism, genocide, an immediate threat of homicide. But these situations are rare. Most human conflicts are actually not in that category, and one reason is because there are so many stages before you get there.

[Police]
The use of force by police is an interesting and related example.
While there may be a day when police are no longer needed, we're just not there yet. So as long

as we need police, then they need to serve the people, all of the people, in this country.

We need to have police officers really be Peace Officers, and to embody that term. Officers need much better nonviolent training, and much better training on how to deal with people using nonlethal force when required. Their duty must be to limit escalation or excessiveness, not just bring force.
The use of lethal force should be a last resort. The police officer's job is to keep citizens alive, including those citizens who break the law.
Containment of violence is obviously important for a police officer, but if there is a man standing twenty feet away holding a knife, then an officer doesn't need to shoot him ten times in the chest in order to contain that violent situation. And that is especially true of an unarmed man.
The degree of force used needs to be proportionate to the degree of actual danger. So we need better laws and training regarding containment of violence and the acceptable use of force by police.

Being a police officer is a very difficult and often thankless job. But at present it is still a necessary and very important one. As such, police officers hold a very important public trust. And betraying that public trust is a huge crime. So the use of impartial oversight over the use of lethal force, police body cameras, and fair due process, are all very important in making sure that the public trust is upheld.

[Military]
As for the use of military force, it should again be a last resort. Unfortunately, it has rarely been used that way in history. It has almost always been used way too soon, when there were other paths of conflict resolution that could have been taken, and even paths that could have been taken after initial clashes.
Violence tends to escalate conflicts, not solve them. So you better be sure it's a situation that really calls for violence as that last resort. A situation where you really have no other choice left in order to prevent massive loss of life. Otherwise, humanity needs intelligent conflict resolution much more than it needs another battle.

There are unfortunately still some things these days that do qualify as requiring that last resort. Acts that involve massive loss of life, acts of terrorism, acts of genocide...these are things that all sensible human beings agree should not be allowed to happen to our human family. And these atrocities are not just a matter of "where our interests are," but where humanity's interests are, where human beings of any color or creed need protection.

We may eventually, and hopefully someday, be able to scale back towards a world with no armies, where they are simply not needed, because the thought of war is finally realized worldwide as being absurd and insane. We are unfortunately not there yet.

But there are other ways in which we can begin to scale back.

Nuclear arms are a good example.
Instead of nuclear disarmament, several of the world's countries over the last fifty years have been moving more towards arms proliferation and development.
But we need to step away from that abyss.
There is no reason to have nuclear weapons that can blow up this planet a thousand times over.
As opposed to more targeted conventional weaponry, nuclear weapons will always involve massive loss of civilian lives.
We should be working towards a world with no nuclear weapons, where they can gradually be scaled back and eventually destroyed.
We need to back away from that abyss of nuclear weapons and massive civilian casualties. We have to stop trying to fight madness with madness.

And we also have to be careful, because the world has often fought wars that weren't even really decided by a particular country's people, but instead by a small group of political and military leaders who basically led everyone else around by the nose...straight into madness.
And those same people have often had a vested interest in keeping the sabers rattling, as peace was simply not on their agenda.

And when it comes to military conflict, if we contain violence, then we also need to actually help alleviate the root problems that created the conflict in the first place.
There can always be a better alternative for people than violence.
Not only is it the right way to help, but it is actually less expensive than war.
Pretty much anything is less expensive than war, in dollars, in pain, in human lives, in setbacks to humanity's learning itself.
And helping creating peace and community through nonviolent work, no matter where it is, is one of the things we are here for.

14. Nonviolent Social Movements

[Study]

Nonviolence is an incredibly powerful force for social change.
But to use Nonviolence effectively in larger conflicts, you have to study it.
One needs to study Gandhi and King, and really understand the principles and methods involved. We may adapt for new situations, but we don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel, because we all stand on the "shoulders of giants," those who came before us and whose work continues to guide. Even King, for example, first studied the practice of Nonviolence by Gandhi, and then combined that with the unending compassion of Jesus.

And Nonviolence should be studied in more depth than just what I cover in this overall section, as I haven't included every concept or method. But the history of Nonviolence, to include Gandhi, King, Khan, the Quakers, the American Women's Suffrage movement and other protest movements, as well as many newer nonviolent movements when they were done well, provide valuable lessons in the practice of Nonviolence.
Nonviolent movements can certainly be decentralized, but the principles and methods involved always remain completely essential.
So like most things worth doing, large-scale Nonviolence requires study, and then practice.

[Smart Strategy]

In the practice of Nonviolence, you often have to adapt strategies to the environment of the conflict. What you do in one place or time might be different than in another. The principles certainly remain the same, but the methods may vary based on what a situation calls for.

That also brings up an important distinction, principled Nonviolence rather than just convenient Nonviolence.
Principled Nonviolence is not just practiced when it's convenient, or when it seems like it might be useful. Because Nonviolence practiced in that way is often uncommitted, poorly planned, tried in bits, often with one finger on the trigger, and then quickly abandoned, as if to say, "See, we tried it for a couple of days and it didn't work. So now we're going back to our old violent ways."
Principled Nonviolence, on the other hand, requires a much fuller commitment to creating change.
It is essentially a way of life, and one we all need to adopt in order for humanity to evolve.

When practiced in large social movements, Nonviolence does indeed require smart strategic planning and organization.
It's important to meet both organized and individual acts of violence with both organized and individual acts of Nonviolence.
And there are always setbacks, so people have to have the kind of principled commitment to Nonviolence that makes a movement sustainable.
It requires both the head and the heart.
But when people are using both, it can change the world.

[Commitment]

Nonviolence requires work, often for years for an individual conflict.
And it's difficult work, with ups and downs, serious setbacks and challenges, because humanity's awakening is a process. And that process is a marathon, not a sprint.
Timing is important. And developing a Zen type of patience is important.
Because the process of change takes time, and it is not at all easy.
But all you have to ask yourself is this...is Peace worth it?

Committing to Nonviolence means recognizing your shared humanity, and committing to reaching your brother without violence.
It means recognizing that violence is the last and worst way to attempt to resolve a conflict.
There is nearly always a better way if you know how to look.

Because one of the easiest ways to *not* have someone see your side of things is to involve them in a violent confrontation.
Because then they always have that tunnel-visioned act of self-defense to justify what they're doing, and so they never really have to address what your original issue was.

In fact, one of the typical ways to try to kill a potential nonviolent movement is to try to turn it into a physical war. A holy war, a race war, any type of fight really. The movement subsides, and both sides simply "feed the beast" of violence again.

One of the reasons Gandhi and King were so successful is that they refused to let that happen.
They refused to let things devolve into a physical war. They refused to let themselves or their allies participate in that.
They simply withdrew consent from that possibility.
And instead they kept their actions nonviolent...and humanity was able to evolve.

Imagine if King, or Gandhi, had given up because of odds, setbacks, frustration, or impatience.
But they didn't. They stayed committed to Nonviolence. They made smart decisions. And they just wouldn't quit.

[It’s not about ego.]

Nonviolence is not done in a self-righteous, superior way.
It’s about equality, not superiority, and each one of us reaching the understanding it takes to get to equality.
Nonviolence is not practiced in an ego-driven way, but in a way that is simply seeking to bridge a divide between human beings.

Sometimes your pride even has to take a hit for the larger cause.

Because people often either do nothing to help, or they want to be the center of attention forever. But neither of those is particularly helpful.

We help as much as we possibly can. But we can’t control everything.
And we can’t become too attached to outcome by tying our sense of self to one particular result.
It’s a funny paradox, but we often have to be able to really strive for something, but also know when to let go.
We just do the work. And if it is true, it almost always works in some way.

[Nonviolence seeks Peace.]

The purpose of protest is not to create and feed off the adrenaline rush of conflict, it is to gradually resolve conflict.

Nonviolence never seeks to create new conflict, it always looks for paths to peaceful negotiation. It’s not about provoking and beating the opposition. If a leader doesn’t recognize that we are all in this together, then they are not someone you want leading a movement, as they’re simply not ready.

Because we go nowhere, if not together.

We often underestimate Nonviolence, and so we are historically always amazed when we see it work.
But by working to create that fellowship of common humanity in an environment, Nonviolence often reaches many of those we thought were out of reach, and it can be amazing how the emotional landscape of a conflict can shift.

15. The Butterfly Effect

Little things do make a difference.
Nothing big ever happens without all of the little things happening that lead up to it.
The butterfly flaps its wings and it gradually causes a typhoon on the other side of the world.

What can one person do?
Nearly anything actually.

Gandhi's Independence Movement in India, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, like most things, those two history-changing movements started with small actions, small beginnings. One person or one small group can eventually become a movement.

As Margaret Meade said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

There is no such thing as zero impact. There is always some effect. You may not know the effect right away, sometimes it's on others, sometimes it's on those watching, sometimes it's on you, and sometimes it takes place over time. But there is always some effect.

People help make the world a better place as individuals and as groups, both locally and globally, in big and small ways.
Never fall for the myth of powerlessness as an individual ("Oh, it's just me, what can I do?"). Because it's often not public, large-scale acts of Nonviolence, but private, small-scale acts of Nonviolence that begin to change the world.

And in truth, it often begins within.
"Be the change you wish to see in the world," as Gandhi is quoted as saying.

In many ways, you can't change the world unless you focus on changing yourself first and foremost. And oftentimes, the two are concurrent. You help others at the same time that you're learning to better yourself, and each in turn makes you better at the other.

Positive change usually begins and ends with that compassion from within. But in order to find the best ways to put that compassion into practice, we are always working on ourselves, and so it helps to never stop learning and to keep an open mind.
Having that open point of view helps keep us from forcing our ideas onto the world, and also from helping only some and not all people.

It also helps keep our practice of Nonviolence in the world a flexible one. For example, an open mind helps us adapt our strategies based on different environments, so we can see how a

particular method might work better in one location rather than another.

And it's also good to remember that we don't have to fly across the world to find challenges, although that is an option.
But on our streets, in our communities, in our selves, there are always ways to help make the world better, wherever we are.

We sometimes say, "Oh, maybe eventually."
But when is the right time to help make the world a better place?
The answer is always now.

16. Martyrs

Martyrdom may seem selfless, but oftentimes it's just another type of ego trap.
There have been some examples of when laying down one's life was necessary and effective for the greater good. But those examples were very, very rare, and primarily involved sacrificing only one's own life, not the lives of others, and certainly not civilians.

Because if you're killing innocent civilians, we should all agree that's a very clear sign that what you're doing is *not* sanctioned by God. It doesn't make one a martyr, just a murderer with a misguided death, who killed their own human brothers out of delusion.

As far as sacrifice generally goes, it's important to remember...
"The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." (Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, 188)

The world doesn't need you to die for your cause, it needs you to live for it...and more importantly, to learn how to live with others.

17. To Rule vs. To Share

To Rule vs. To Share.
They're incompatible really. Some tyrants try to claim that they want both, but at the end of the day, that's an inherent contradiction. You either seek to share and have real equality, or you want to rule over others. It's really quite simple.
The mind trick that you can have both is either an illusion or a lie. It has to eventually be one or the other. One can't rule over and truly share with people at the same time. It just ends up being, "You're free to do whatever you like...as long as it in no way threatens my power over people."

One has to let go of the desire for power over others at some point, in order for people to truly share, and to truly be free.
Otherwise, we end up with leaders who are basically little ego tyrants, like selfish children who refuse to let go and mature.

Ruling vs. Sharing.
Controlling vs. Sharing.
Even in every hero, there is that potential to be a tyrant if their ego refuses to let go of control over others.

We all need to eventually lose that desire to rule or be ruled.

To be able to say, "We are equal human beings. I have no desire for you to ever kneel in inequality to me, nor will I ever kneel in inequality to you."
We can both be strong and equal together.

18. Fear in Oppressive Regimes

Most oppressive regimes actually depend on public opinion more than they ever want to admit, and their use of fear, or threat of force, is often unable to handle sustained, organized nonviolent resistance...especially once it reaches critical mass.

If fear or desire are primary ways to keep people in control, and people begin to overcome those fears and desires, then they cannot be controlled so easily.

An extreme example of this is when people in a social movement begin to overcome their fears of imprisonment, pain, or even death. They may not lose those fears altogether, but because they hold on to other things that they believe are more important, the oppressive regime around them begins to tremble.
Good examples of this were seen with the American Civil Rights Movement in the face of terrorism from the KKK and the State itself, as well as Gandhi's Indian Independence Movement against British imperial rule.

Power regimes, even the most oppressive ones, are inherently based on at least some degree of consent and cooperation.
An oppressive power regime still rests on consent, even if it's coerced consent.
Which is why non-cooperation and the withdrawal of consent threaten an oppressive power regime.
The tyrant's greatest fear is people remembering that they do, in fact, have a choice.

That's also the reason why oppressive regimes often attempt to clamp down on any outside ideas or information other than their own.

One reason that tyrannical regimes and hegemonies have always feared Nonviolence is that it is often a lot more difficult to fight an idea, a truth in action, than an enemy with a gun.
A regime may be used to dealing with violence, but fighting an idea, especially one that has caught hold, is a whole other matter.
And when the people that carry that idea forward just won't stay down, and when their acts of Nonviolence and humanity actually win people over who might otherwise side towards the safety of the status quo, then that movement becomes much more threatening to an oppressive system.
That kind of love and truth is just awfully difficult for real injustice to handle, especially for an extended period of time.

The power of a government should ultimately rest in the hands of those who would be governed.
In whatever particular political form a government takes, which is not a silver bullet by any means, good governance requires transparency, oversight, accountability, equality, individual freedom, and open participation.

The end goal, as with most things, is not a top-down power structure, but a shared responsibility structure.

Fear and security have an interesting relationship in our present time.
We find governments often using the fear of insecurity to justify actions, and then it becomes a question of how far we are willing to go in an attempt to try to guarantee security.
But we have to be careful, because you can justify almost anything for security, and human society has done some truly horrible things in the past in the name of security.

Which is strange, because security, to some degree, is always a bit of an illusion.
We are never completely safe and secure, there is always a chance of loss and death, it's just a part of life on Earth. And usually the deaths that we cannot control far outnumber any that we can.
But in order to extend the illusion of security and control further, we are often willing to make huge sacrifices in our own freedom, culture, and even our own humanity.
We are on Earth for a finite time. We are not here to live forever in this place. We are certainly here to change the world and ourselves before we leave, but that is not something that can be easily done if we live in a state of constant paranoia and fear of one another.
So the question of what is a reasonable, or unreasonable, precaution is an important one.
There are reportedly eight billion people in the world right now. Millions of people die every year humans are on this Earth, and will continue to do so for as long as we are here, so the question of how to limit that number slightly is perhaps somewhat less important than the question of what kind of society will we have while we are here?

Because one way to keep people from living and learning together is to keep them afraid of one another.
Keep introducing fear and chaos into their lives, and people tend to forget all about why they're here, and they just focus on keeping things as close to the status quo as possible and keeping what they have.
Self-preservation can be used to justify almost anything, and soon everything begins to be described as some form of emergency. So you end up with a permanent state of emergency.
And in that state, people often accept almost anything. And you in fact begin to destroy the very culture that you are trying to protect.

Don't let fear do that to us.

We can't eliminate all dangers. We all have to go at some point, it's just a part of being on this planet.
Yes, we can minimize the dangers that we can reasonably control as human beings. But that is the key word...reasonably.
After that, we just have to roll with it.
Because we can't let ourselves be bullied by fear into losing our freedom, our culture, and most importantly, our love and trust of one another.

19. Trust

It's important that we don't give into a paranoid mindset, but continue to trust in one another. We often live in a world that seems to manufacture fear and mistrust, and then uses it to drive humanity away from one another.

But it's important that we refuse to give into that, and instead continue to trust and help each other more each day.
Because one way to keep people from helping one another is to keep people afraid of one another.

And we are so afraid of one another sometimes. We have developed what is often a culture of fear and mistrust.

It makes sense to be smart and intuitive, but generally, people are good.
Although a few may be off track, the vast majority are simply good people who are trying to navigate life just like we all are.

So don't buy into a culture of cynicism. Keep your faith in humanity and in the good within each of us.
Together we can choose to either foster a culture of trust or a culture of fear.

20. Trade doesn't solve everything.

Peace via trade can certainly be helpful in tying countries together, but it does not solve all of our problems or actually guarantee peace.
And one reason is that it doesn't solve for economic disparity.

International trade can help spread wealth with its interactions and encourage peace, but if the systems that are trading aren't actually working towards real equality (and many aren't), then it is simply a stopgap that can eventually wear off as the economic bubbles burst.
And then you're back with the same problems again, like economic disparity and poverty, which work as catalysts for violence.

Similarly, although it may help for a while, mutual self-interest doesn't always maintain a lasting peace once resources begin to get scarce.
Why? Because a peace that is based solely on self-interest generally only lasts as long as the material benefits of that relationship continue.

To have a true lasting peace, it has to be a larger cultural change than that. It has to be based on human empathy larger than just one's own country. We have to be able to recognize the *fellowship of the human family*. And peace via trade may certainly facilitate that understanding, but trade is just an element, it's not comprehensive.
It's not just about trade. We, as humanity, have to learn to actually work together to make all of our lives better.

21. Prison as rehabilitation.

If you want to change criminal behavior, then just locking people in a cage together is usually not the most effective method.
For most, it will feel like just as much of a jungle as the outside world did before. And so they are unlikely to change, except to adapt themselves even more to a hostile environment in order to survive.

It can't only be about punishment.
The containment, the lack of freedom, is certainly a punishment.
But it has to also be about rehabilitation.

In order to rehabilitate someone who has committed a serious crime, you have to work to reawaken their humanity and awareness, and also re-educate them on how to coexist within society. And a prison that functions like a dangerous jungle is a pretty terrible environment for doing any of that.
We have to contain the danger, certainly. But if our goal is rehabilitation and education over time, then we must also create a better system/environment for those human beings who have been contained.

People also need better opportunities once they have served their time. Crimes are typically symptoms, not causes. Often, the primary causes are educational and economic. We need to be better at both educating, as well as raising the level of economic equality, otherwise that particular type of crime cycle will never end.

When it comes to violent crime, people weren't born hating one another. No one here was born wanting to hate or hurt another human being.
Which means we must have picked up most of those thoughts and behaviors along the way.
Our traits tend to be more nurture than nature.
If people make poor choices, then yes, they have to be responsible for those choices.
But it's also just as often that they did not have a very good education as a compassionate human being to begin with. Which is further proof that educating human beings in Nonviolence could not be more important.
When we are taught compassion and empathy as we grow up, along with an all-around education and economic opportunity, then that opens the way for all of us to be who we really are.

When people commit violent crimes, it does take empathy to understand exactly how they got there. Sometimes people end up in a dark place mentally, and we have to first definitely contain the effects of their actions, and then try to awaken, re-educate, and guide them back over time.

And we may always have a few people who are just insane, but as we work to create a better community, we should have less and less people in the world who feel like they are driven into insanity.

We all have challenges, and we handle many of them on our own. But we need less people who lose their grip on reality because they feel so isolated, who get lost in the mental struggle with no one around to help keep them connected to the rest of humanity. Because, except for the truly insane, everyone can be reached on some level of human connection.

On a related note, capital punishment simply needs to be phased out. It typically fails as a deterrent, and the odds suggest that we most likely have already murdered at least one innocent prisoner.
And moreover, once a human being is contained, then you're no longer talking about self-defense or containment, you're just talking about violent retribution.
And we are not God. Deciding who deserves to live and die is not our task. That's not up to us.
And as human beings, we need to think of not only the victim of a violent crime as our family, but also the perpetrator of a violent crime as our family. And then we can ask ourselves, if they were in our family, while we would certainly want them arrested and contained, wouldn't we also want them to have some chance of rehabilitation over their lifetime?

Occasionally, there are just some very lost souls, and sometimes their re-education is beyond human means. But we always contain, and do our best to help rehabilitate them from their madness while they're here, and then just hope they figure things out in the afterlife.
But either way, having hope for lost souls, and attempting to help them at least start their recovery from their inhumanity, makes us all better human beings for it. They may or may not be rehabilitated, but we will always try.

On a related side note, it's always strange to see Christians in favor of the death penalty (and even torture), when Jesus was a victim of both.

The crimes we commit against one another are not only a safety issue, but also a social issue, an educational and economic issue, and at times a mental health issue. Prison is not about retribution. It is about punishment and the containment of physical danger, but it's also about rehabilitation.
And we have to recognize that we still have problematic issues within the criminal justice system itself. As with any system, society always needs to address structural inequalities.
Are civil rights being apportioned equally or not? How do factors like wealth or race affect due process, verdicts, or sentencing?
And there are also problems within the laws themselves. Violent versus nonviolent drug offenses is one recent example. There are always degrees within any type of crime, and society decides where to draw those lines, like most laws. But are those lines between violent and nonviolent crimes well drawn at the moment? Or do we have people in prison who probably should not be there, and who should have been in treatment and rehabilitation programs instead?
So we definitely have things we need to work on.

Again, think of a human being who has committed a crime as a member of your family. Despite

their crime, you would still hope for their eventual rehabilitation.

We have to create a prison system that is no longer a place to just throw people out of the way, but that is a place of actual rehabilitation, that works towards people eventually participating in society again.

22. A Culture of Violence

We have been conditioned into a culture of violence.
And just like other types of conditioning, once you start to pay attention, you'll notice it quite often.

To begin with, we glorify violence and war.

One can respect and value the human beings who were involved in conflicts, and honor their acts of bravery, and yet still be able to critique our own human actions and recognize that the entire violent cycle and mindset is continually holding us back as humanity.

Wars show humanity's failure at resolving conflicts without massive loss of life.
Wars are not glorious.

To shift a culture of violence towards a culture of Nonviolence, we have to break the cycle, and change the idea that violence is a completely acceptable and even celebrated way of dealing with conflict.

In the US, our gun control policy, or lack thereof, is another example of our culture of violence.
We don't just arm a police force, tested and well trained, with strict oversight and a duty for the defense of citizens.
Instead, we arm civilians, with all of their daily stresses, and we arm them with handguns and automatic weapons, the type of guns not for hunting and unlikely home defense but guns designed specifically to kill human beings by the dozen.

We are a bit like children in a school yard who are now armed.
We weaponize kids in a school yard, and then expect them to learn to embody love and peace, the primary reason we are all here to begin with.

A heavily armed populace is very much an example of a culture of violence.

And it hinders our development as human beings.

But we maintain a culture of fear and violence towards one another from an early age.
In fact, we actually give guns to children to play with. "Here's a replica of a weapon that's designed to kill another human being, go, have fun!"
Movies, tv shows, even our most popular video games today have a kind of pathological attachment to gun violence.
With our human history of violence against one another, especially gun violence, you'd think we would be raising people to have a reasoned aversion to guns, not a mindless attraction to them.

“Those who live by the sword, die by the sword,” Jesus said, and that has been true for as long as humanity has been here.
Because we have never actually committed to breaking out of that cycle.
We have never committed to changing our cultural idea of violence in order to finally free ourselves from it.
As beings, we have not yet chosen to evolve.

When it comes to entertainment, we constantly glorify violence, and have definitely created a culture of “violence as entertainment.”

We maintain a world where, as human beings growing up watching movies and television, the main people we’ve seen as heroes have almost always been “people with guns,” helping ensure that a mentality of violence never recedes far from our psyche.
And thus, it helps sustain and reinforce a culture of violence.

Comparatively, in music, when there are issues, it tends to be more sexism than violence.
We wrap something in a catchy melodic hook, or a great beat, but the lyrical message is sometimes toxic, especially towards women.

People do not design things by accident, and the choices we have been making in entertainment, whether to help the world be a better place or not, have not always been encouraging.

We have often appealed to the lowest common denominator instead of working to pull people together and raise the whole level of society up. And we’ve typically defended those choices with the excuse that, “They’re the ones buying it. I’m just giving people what they want.”

In truth, a lot of the entertainment industry has never cared too much, as long as it sells.

And one of the main rationales used has been that entertainment is simply “reflecting” reality.
Which is true...but only in part.

Because entertainment is both a reflector *and* an influencer.

Our actions have effects, we’re not living in a vacuum.
Entertainment may reflect some of our ideas about our reality, but it can also influence and reinforce those ideas (negatively or positively).

Sometimes entertainment is just reinforcing the same negative thought patterns, narratives, traps, and cycles that we’ve all been caught up in for so long.
And sometimes it even creates new variants on those.

Now it’s true that an individual movie or song won’t typically cause someone to be violent or sexist, but it will help keep them in that mindset.

And when that mindset is repeated over and over and over again in nearly every show they watch or every song they listen to...well, that doesn't have zero effect on someone's mind.
You might not see a smoking gun in most cases, but it is certainly psychological reinforcement, reinforcement, reinforcement of a particular mindset.

So there is an effect, both individually and culturally. It can act as a catalyst.

Although, many in the entertainment industry tend to only take responsibility for those effects when it's convenient.
When they want the credit for those effects, they say, "We create these things artistically in order to have an impact on the world, you're welcome."
And when they want to deny any responsibility for those effects, they say, "No, it's just a reflection."

But as far as the arts go, I do not think it's something that should be legislated. It should be all of us that gradually use our influence to change things. The arts will evolve as we evolve.
And there has been some progress on these types of issues.
But still, we probably all need to make better choices.

And it's difficult sometimes.
Because you can find yourself listening a lot to a song that's got a great beat or melody, but then you realize the lyrics are entirely chauvinistic towards women.
Or you're playing a game that seems fun, but then you realize it rewards some of humanity's worst behaviors, like viciousness and cowardice, and wraps it all in gun violence.
Or you're watching a movie or show that feels addictively entertaining, but then you realize it's subtly reinforcing our worst views about humanity, or that it's steeped in extreme violence used for stimulation.

So the responsibility falls in part on us voting with our choices, and in part on those who create entertainment.

Recognizing that entertainment not only reflects, but also creates, inspires, and influences...what sort of choices are entertainers making?
There is certainly incredible talent across the entertainment industry, and a lot of people are creating wonderful works of art that both entertain and inspire us.
But not everyone makes great choices in how they decide to influence the world.

When we make entertainment, art, music, film, games, television, etc., regardless of our beliefs, we should still be asking ourselves the important questions. What are we trying to bring humanity towards, our best or our worst? Are we helping or hurting? Given that we all bear some responsibility for the influence that we wield, what will be my influence?
Just because something sells, doesn't actually make it a good choice. So if I'm going to do something just because it sells, regardless of the effects, then why am I even here? Am I here to help all that I can, or just grab all the cash that I can?

Those are important questions that we have often neglected to ask.

But back to our culture of violence, specifically.
We need to do a better job of depicting violence without glorifying it. Without celebrating it as the valid way to solve problems. “Just shoot everyone...”
We’re so busy glorifying the violent hero and the cycle of violence in our stories that we often neglect any other type of heroic acts that are nonviolent.

Life is not as simple as our fictional creations suggest.
Life takes more learning, more coming together, it’s not a story you can just personify with violence and then shoot your way out of the problem.
Life is more about waging peace, than waging war.
And learning that lesson is a huge challenge for humanity, much more than firing a trigger to kill each other has ever been, and we don’t need to make that challenge of peace any harder.

Whether it’s a lack of gun control or a lack of responsible choices in entertainment, however you try to spin them, these are examples of the fact that we have a very serious Culture of Violence at the moment.
It is most definitely not a Culture of Nonviolence. It is most definitely not a Culture of Peace.
Perhaps it’s time we work on that.

23. Why are Nonviolence and other important courses not taught in school?

Nonviolence may be the most important thing we could possibly learn as human beings, and the fact that it isn't standard curriculum in school is somewhat insane.

Violence has always been our most fundamental human problem, and yet the problem itself is hardly ever addressed.

There are other courses that would be quite valuable for us as well, courses like comparative religion or cultural studies. These are courses that improve our ability to see different perspectives, and help develop our empathy and understanding of one another despite differences. So it would be wise if those were standard as well.
But Nonviolence especially, as it addresses the conflicts that arise from our lack of understanding, is really essential to humanity and should be as common as the study of reading, writing, and arithmetic in school.

Quite simply, in our efforts to educate ourselves, we have actually failed to teach humanity the most important lessons about how to understand and peacefully coexist with one another. Perhaps it's time we start?

24. Breaking the Cycle. The need for a Paradigm Shift.

As a culture, humanity has taken part in an endless cycle of violence.
How much foresight does it take for us to see that as long as we continue in this paradigm, this same mindset of violence, then that cycle will never end?

For the world we all want to live in, we will have to make the choice to retire from that long insane civil war among our own human family, and commit to helping build peace and community in the world.
And to break that cycle, we have to do the real work, rather than just passing the burden as we have often done.
We have to shift the paradigm.

[Conflicts]

A lot of people talk about the importance of peace, or equality, but they don't want to actually do the work that will help us get there.

Remember, even more than political leadership, peace is up to the regular folks, that vast majority that outnumbers those governing or fighting *by millions*. It's up to us to put a stop to it and say, "Enough. We choose peace."
"We will work hard to solve the problems that are causing conflicts, but we choose peace and Nonviolence to do so."

And then only the few craziest on each side will be left out, and that is much easier for humanity to deal with.

But we must choose not to let those extremists run our societies, our religions, or our countries.

Often in conflicts, both sides have some stuff right, and a lot of stuff wrong. A given side's efforts are often based on some pretty good things (loyalty, family, faith, self-determination, self-defense, bravery, etc.), but then also some really bad things (vengeance, anger, fear, aggression, raw self-interest, intolerance, extremism, etc.).
We then add in things like skewed logic or half-truths, and often a false choice or false dichotomy as well, and overall, human beings are just excellent at getting things all twisted together so that we can't separate the good from the bad, and the cycle of violence just continues to trap us all like a bad drama that we can't bring ourselves to let go of.

Similarly, in most conflicts, there are soldiers, martyrs, and innocents lost on both sides. And we often use those "martyrs" as an excuse to war on forever.

But instead of epic games of "got you last" with no real introspection, just the pain of war and

revenge over and over again, we need to choose healing and choose peace.
We need to forgive and let go of what our brother has done, and those lives lost, in order to stop us all from continually destroying our human family forever.

[The Personal within Conflicts]

Many involved in fighting are so afraid of facing change in themselves or facing their past that they often prefer continued war and violence for that very reason.

One common reaction is basically, “I am going to take what pain or suffering or loss I have received, and in turn inflict it upon the world.”
And this is in contrast to those wise souls who say, “I will overcome what pain or loss or suffering I have received, and I will work to make the world a better place, and possibly keep others from having to bear what I have had to bear.”
Those are the wise souls who try to limit the world’s suffering, rather than increase it.

And often we are caught up in cycles of violence (physical, psychological, social) that began long before we even got here.

But we must not inherit the prejudices of our parents.
Although they surely made good choices as well, we must not inherit the prejudices and mistakes and poor choices of those who came before us.
We don’t need to inherit any more burdens than necessary, because history and society usually have plenty for us already.

So take the good and leave the bad, so the future will not be the same as the past, and humanity will learn to get better and better, rather than just repeating its mistakes over again.

At some point, we just have to use our own compassionate consciousness to outshine our conditioning.

[Next Steps]

We all long for a world that is more together, more equal, more loving.
But we have to do the work to get there.

As was noted before, when is the right time to help make the world a better place?
The answer to that is always now.

So now is the time to question, to learn, to think, to show up, to speak, to challenge, to gather, to organize, to innovate, to cooperate, to adapt, to communicate, to love.

And there are always small steps and setbacks, but this is how we evolve. This is how things get better.

Instead of continually fighting and tearing each other down, so that we never get where we are going together, we need to start to shift.

We need to shift our emphasis in the use of force.
We need to shift towards cooperation.
We need to shift towards a Culture of Nonviolence.

We now recognize Nonviolence occasionally in movements and individual acts, but we have yet to fully realize its value enough to ingrain it within our culture.
Humanity has yet to choose a nonviolent state of being.

So instead, the world just keeps returning to the brink of madness and catastrophe.

Humanity needs to mature and evolve beyond the point where conflicts end in violence.
We've been killing each other and trying to use violence as a solution forever. Maybe it's time we try something different?

We have been maintaining a culture of violence, where violence is seen not only as "acceptable" as a means of conflict resolution but often as the only means of conflict resolution. And so we have consistently failed to see alternatives.

But we need to commit to pursue ways to end the cycle of violence, rather than continue it.
Instead of a culture that embraces and reinforces violence, we need a Culture of Nonviolence, one where Nonviolence is always the go-to method of conflict resolution.

[Conclusions]

Being human beings, Gandhi and King may not have been perfect, but in terms of Nonviolence, we need someone like them on every street corner.

Even if a person like Gandhi or King were one in a million (which is doubtful, since we can all be that type of person), that would still give us 8,000 such people in the world.
Just imagine what kind of change the world would see with 8,000 Gandhi's or 8,000 MLK's.

We have to have a Paradigm Shift in our approach to conflict resolution.
It is key to both our survival and our spiritual evolution that we commit to Nonviolence, and to sustaining a Culture of Nonviolence, in order to end the cycle of violence we keep returning to.

How can we talk about "future generations," and yet not address Violence vs. Nonviolence and the need for a *substantial* paradigm shift in our culture?

As humanity, we are very slow learners in some ways.
But if there was one skill to teach humanity, and only one, Nonviolence would be it.

If you wanted one calling that humanity could apply to all areas of life (violence, religion, economics, relationships, etc.) in order to better our existence, then Nonviolence would be it. That would be the direction to move in.

That is the most important Paradigm Shift.

Part 4 - Spirituality and Mindfulness

1. Spiritual Evolution

Life is a process of spiritual evolution.

We are souls who are learning to be our wiser, divine selves.
We are evolving into a higher state of being.
And Earth is essentially our school for that process.

We all learn in different ways, and we each take our own unique path to understanding.
Our education itself is a complicated and often difficult process.
Wisdom is more difficult than knowledge, and there is a lot to learn. So we move in small steps.
It's a marathon, not a sprint.

As Emerson said, "Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood."

It can be a difficult existence sometimes, but we get better and better at it as we continue to learn.

And our education is a curious mix of free will and planning.
There is planning on a divine level, but because our learning is dependent on us making choices, it has to respond to and adjust for our choices and free will.

Oftentimes, we can see the truth and value of a lesson, or even a hardship, after the fact.
But sometimes, the purpose of it seems to be simply beyond our understanding. And that can be the case with some of our most difficult experiences here.

Also, because we are learning together, we often act as educators of each other, sometimes unknowingly.
But none of us are perfect, so we have both good educators and bad educators, and we make both good and bad choices. Although, due to the nature of this place, it's often hard not to learn something, even when it is a fairly poor lesson.

But overall, we still need to make this place a better learning environment than it is.
Because right now, it's not a great one. And much of that is our own doing, because of our own choices. Because much of the learning that we do here is up to us.
So it's up to us to make it better. Sometimes even choosing to make a difficult learning environment into a better one is part of the learning process.

But an evolution of consciousness takes time.

And sometimes we are very slow learners.
That's one of the reasons humanity just keeps cycling sometimes, because it is not learning from

its mistakes, so it is having to cycle through the same lessons over and over.
Nonviolence vs. violence is a prime example of a lesson that we have failed to learn, so we have had to continue to cycle through the madness of violence until we decide to finally work harder to rid ourselves of it.

We also have an interesting student population here on Earth.
For example, if we were all the same race/gender/sexuality/religion, how would that really help us learn to love one another?
It's easy to love someone who's just like you.
But instead, our diversity challenges us to love those who differ from us, thereby deepening our understanding of love.

It's also important to note that what we're talking about is a spiritual evolution, not a physical evolution. In fact, our high rate of multiplying tends to make our education more difficult, like a school system where the kids keep having kids before they themselves have even progressed very far.

So our journey here is a spiritual one.
Some souls are older than others and have learned things here before, but we are all still learning really. None of us has all of the answers. It is always a lifetime learning process.

And since you never know where lessons will come from sometimes, that in itself can be a joy. Although there can be darkness too. And there will always be challenges, which are a huge part of learning.
As someone once said, "Life is the classroom. Love is the lesson."

In the monotheistic origin story of Adam and Eve, perhaps the metaphorical apple was less a test of blind obedience and more the beginning of a deliberate and very long process to teach wisdom and understanding. A chance for human beings to mature. A chance for human beings to actually learn, rather than just be told.

Because otherwise, for someone of unlimited knowledge to tempt someone with limited knowledge, and then punish them for it, is sort of like unfairly punishing a child. Any good parent knows that if you leave something important in the middle of the room with a child, and just say, "Don't touch that," there's a pretty good chance that they will. So do you believe God was a good parent and knew what would probably happen, or not?

As for the learning process, the best parents usually manage to find a good balance in teaching life lessons, between helping too much and helping too little, so that kids can mostly learn to understand on their own and in their own way.
"This One Way Only" is often not the best method for a group of unique individuals to learn.

And most life lessons can really only be learned by individuals making their own choices.

Speaking of choices...many religious zealots predict the end of the world every year, one effect of which is, they choose not to do nearly as much as they could to help make this a better place here and now.
If you're hoping you could do nothing to help, and then get a pass to heaven based simply on belief, you're probably going to find yourself right back here having to learn the same lessons in compassion that you failed to learn the first time.

Don't let your religious views on the afterlife give you an excuse for not doing the *work*. Don't use those beliefs as an excuse for not helping humanity, one and all, learn to be a more loving, conscious group of human beings here and now.
Heaven probably depends more on your state of being than your beliefs. And if your state of being is that you try to ignore and abandon your fellow human beings, then you clearly aren't ready yet.
We have to learn to live and love together here, before anywhere else.
We go nowhere if not together.

Life is a spiritual evolution.
We move in small steps. Our learning is a long process, and it takes time.
But in that same sense, we also get to take our time and really enjoy the journey, as together we all strive towards wisdom and compassion, and our higher state of being.

2. The Soul Within

Know thyself.
Recognize the soul within.
Many of us haven't really awakened to our own divine consciousness yet.
But when you let go of the things that don't define you, and you sit and meditate, and begin to resonate and shine love, you can feel it. You can feel that light and love within.

It's so important to be able to connect with our own soul, to remember who we are, and to recognize our loving consciousness within.

We are all both human and divine.
A divine spirit in a human form.
As children of God, we would be no less.

And on some level, we already know this.
And so, as we go through life, we learn to listen more to our inner self, and to recognize the divine spirit within.
And we learn to recognize it in others.

That experience of recognizing the soul of another is well represented by the Hindu term "Namaste."
One frequent translation of it is, "The divine within me recognizes the divine within you."

It's to be able to see and love the divine in each of us, and to recognize that spiritual relationship between us all.

3. The Mountain

Living on Earth is like living on an enormous mountain, with an immense plateau about halfway up, where there is actually room enough for everyone.

But instead of coexisting peacefully on the plateau, we're just fighting and scrabbling in the dirt on the side of the mountain. People are fighting both economically and physically, trying to claim the top of the mountain, trying to build castles there, whole armies of people fighting and killing each other on the slopes of the mountain.
And for no good reason.

Because humanity doesn't get anywhere, if not together.
It's part of our challenge of being here.

Family, friends, the people around us, cities, countries, the world, wherever we are...we're all in this together.

And when no one tries to really own the top of the mountain, then we all win, because we can all just walk up together.
It's the only way it works really, and the only way we make sure there is always room for everyone.
Because humanity is just not going to get there unless we want freedom and equality for everyone.

Some people keep waiting for God to come down from on high and fix our problems, but part of the nature of our existence here is, *it's up to us*.
The "promised land" is not so much a geographic location, as a state of being. And all of us, as human beings, just haven't gotten there yet.
It's up to us *to learn to live together*.

4. Not One, but Many Paths to God

There is not one, but many paths to God.

Which makes sense, given how different people are, that we would each have a different learning path to the divine.

No two sets of eyes see things in quite the same way. No one else stands in that particular spot on the Earth that you stand in right now.
So the "You must see exactly what I see, and describe it exactly as I describe it" mentality about God is madness. That's like assigning strict rules for what people are allowed to see while cloud watching.
Every view is going to be different. It isn't about the exact "right" view of God, but the right view for you. It's about finding your unique path to spirituality.

Religions are like different paths through the wilderness that eventually run to the same door.

It's not just one path, one book, one language.
Humanity's learning curve is way more complex than that.

Historically though, religions have often had a gatekeeper mentality, like trying to set up toll booths on the paths to God.
"Well, this religion started because someone had a spiritual experience, but sorry, that's it, no one else can have another spiritual experience after this, not without going through us."

And so religions have often tried to act as the gatekeepers for spirituality. They've tried to fence off paths, and some even charge money for admission.
But don't fall for it. If you need to get by such gatekeepers on your spiritual journey through life, feel free to just walk around. No one owns these paths.

We are all on this journey of shared humanity and divinity together, and there are many paths to walk.

The idea is absurd that spiritual giants such as Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, etc. were not all leading us to eventually live in the same house.
As Jesus said, "My Father's house has many rooms." (John 14:2)

There are many different paths to God.
And we all take a wandering path to get there.
And some may claim they have the only way to the top, but that is just not the case.
A religion, a tradition, is simply a path.

Jesus may have said, “I am the way” (John 14:6), and other spiritual leaders essentially said the same thing about their individual traditions, but there were reasons for that.
Many of these religions were trying to corral, attract, and gain followers during turbulent times. Often they were directly competing with dozens of other religions, gods, cults, tribal beliefs, etc. in the same area. And it’s difficult to gain followers amidst all of the religions shouting across the marketplace unless you have some kind of claim to exclusivity. Unless you can say, “Listen to me. Because I’m the only one that can get you to heaven. Not any of those other guys.” That alone would bring in listeners and devotees.

Jesus specifically would have had a similar issue while competing with a Judaic tradition that he was seeking to revise. Not only that, but if his statement was in fact a metaphor, then it was accurate.
If “the way” doesn’t mean Christianity (which didn’t exist yet), but means simply the way of unconditional love and compassion, then what he said was accurate. And would in fact apply to any religion.

But as for claims of exclusivity in order to compete with other religions, the things about that is, humanity has now grown beyond the need for it.
It’s similar to how a parent might say, “This one way is the way you should do things.” But eventually we mature into adults and realize there are in fact other ways to do things, many of them just as valid, and we are mature enough to make our own decisions about what is right for us.
As a young child though, we were not ready for that yet, and may have needed the simple direction. But then we grew up.

Love, wisdom, connection to God...these things are never limited to one age, one culture, one religion. Many, many have had it.
It’s like one river, with many tributaries.
No one religion has a patent on love or spirituality.

And you can believe what you believe without completely denying the value of another’s beliefs.

The solution to human love and understanding is not to just all be the same and think the same. How would we actually learn anything from that?
What better way to teach love and understanding than by making human beings so different in appearance, personality, and belief?
Learning to love one another, in all of our diversity, is a big part of the lesson.

Unfortunately, we haven’t yet shown much of that kind of wisdom and understanding.

As each religion has developed, most of them have tried to quickly assert their claim to have “The” answer.

Each one takes its turn to say, “No, no, you messed it up. WE got it right.”
They then proceed to mess things up in some new ways (and many of the same old ways as well).
And yet each claims, “We have The Perfect Answer! The Final Answer! This is it! There will be No More after this!”
And yet, none of them are perfect, and none of them are final.

But they each shout, “We are Right, and everyone who came before us, and anyone else in the world, is Wrong.”

But the wisest people in the world, recognizing that none of us have all of the answers, always leave plenty of room for questioning, critique, reason, freedom of thought, comparison, balance, and tolerance.

Unfortunately, religious leaders have often failed to match that wisdom.
Many religions have revolved around the hope that, in the end, we are right and everyone else is wrong, we are chosen and are the only ones welcome in some version of heaven, as opposed to everyone else.
This is in contrast to the idea that we are all chosen in some way, that’s part of why we are here as human beings, and that in the end, no one will truly be left behind.

But instead, many religions have tended to foster this insane idea that they can “win” the world.
But there is no “winning” in that sense. The only way you can “win” the world is by eliminating or forcibly converting everyone else in the world who disagrees with you, which is basically “losing,” as you and everyone else would all lose your humanity in the process.
So this “manifest destiny” idea that many religions have kept on their agenda is pure madness.
There is no spiritual wisdom or heart in it, it is just skewed.

A religion may say, “We are special. We are saved. All of them are not.” But how would that worldview change if we found out that we all eventually end up in the same place?
If we realized that we are, in fact, all in this together.

Isn’t it interesting that Jerusalem, a relatively small place, is a holy site to three different major religions?
Maybe it’s a test. Maybe we are not meant to kill and destroy each other for our beliefs, but to actually learn to live together.

Because with the Middle East...eventually...if no one forgives, then no one survives.

But in the meantime, we fight among the relics and places where messages were delivered, and yet we miss the heart of the actual messages.

It’s so strange to see Muslims or Christians who hate Jews, when both Abraham and Jesus were Jewish. Or Muslims and Jews who hate one another, when their religions and their biblical ancestry have so many commonalities.

What makes us think that our religion is the only one that God has had a hand in?

We have to learn to release our grip on the idea that we alone have the only and absolute truth. No religion or person has a monopoly on spiritual truth, or wisdom, or love.

We, and our religions, certainly have pieces of truth. But none of us have the entire truth and understanding of everything in the world, so we have to let go of that certainty that we are entirely right and everyone else is entirely wrong.
We are all evolving and spiritually learning together, and it is a process.

It may be reassuring to cling to one thing, one silver bullet, one book, and say, "Here are all of my answers. I just have to do this."
But life, and learning, are not that simple.

When it comes to learning, there is not one thing that will just give us directions for everything. That wouldn't be learning. And that is what we are here to do, to learn to live and love together.

Speaking of learning, Comparative Religion really should be an essential course taught in schools. To learn about other religions, other cultures, to see similarities and relationships between them, does not make any particular one less valuable. In fact, it reinforces our shared humanity, and our shared spiritual kinship. And it helps promote peace for the future.

A pluralistic society can fortunately allow for more than one view to exist.
When we don't think there should be a state religion, even if it might be our own, then we're usually on a good track in that regard.

One can appreciate someone else's beliefs, even though it may not be exactly right for their own path.
Just as ideas that are wise and transcendent belong to all of humanity, not just one section of humanity, one can also find wisdom and value in a religion despite not being a devotee of that religion.

There have been many wonderful religious leaders...and many, many more individual Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Nonreligious, and others, who were all doing, and continue to do, great work in the world.

And conversely, within each, there have also been those who were not good leaders of peace, love, or understanding.

But with so many good people of all religions living in the world, the idea of religious exclusivity is fairly absurd.
The idea that you must believe in a specific cosmology, and probably be fortunate enough to be

born in a certain country or time period to certain parents, in order to be an enlightened spiritual being, is ridiculous.

Loving kindness, empathy, these are traits of the human spirit that are well beyond any denomination or religious exclusivity.

For example, take notice how the Golden Rule of Empathy is present in nearly every religion on Earth.

We actually can all agree on the most important things, those things that unite all human beings across all religious boundaries.
And the rest is mostly details, and to each their own in terms of those beliefs, as long as they are not persecuting others for them.

Because we are all put here on this planet to learn to live together.

[note- If those in the world who are fighting right now over religion would appreciate just this one chapter, then most of our age-old religious conflicts could gradually wash away.]

5. Religious Absolutism

Religious absolutism is a big problem.
People seem to think that if they don't take every single word of a religious work as literally true, then the work as a whole has no value or truth to it.
But you can still find great truth and value in something without swallowing every single word of it blindly.

First off, all religious works were originally written by human beings, who were quite imperfect. And over many years, those works were compiled, edited, and copied by even more human beings, who were also fallible.

A rational way to look at it is this...

1) Anything written in history was written by a human being.
2) Human beings are fallible.
3) Therefore, anything written in history is open to questioning.

Secondly, we can just use common sense and look closely at the works themselves.

For example, do hundreds of rules about how to slaughter animals, or sow crops, or be clean, read like the words of God, or do they read more like the words of leaders who were trying to keep their people healthy, clean, and organized during difficult times?

Similarly, do rules about ritual purity in animal sacrifice, or rules about ritual purity in performing ablutions, read like God, or do they read more like human OCD?
Not that a rabbi or imam with OCD wasn't helpful in a time when hygiene alone could help keep your population from dying off.

Like most religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all formed in a time of tribalism, clannishness, and religious competition. Plus there was a certain amount of human ignorance and disorder.

So when looking at some of these religious texts, think about what it would have taken to get through to and organize the "rabble" at that time.

Everything is to some degree a product of its time.
So some of the social rules that religious leaders used to keep the peace or survive back then, we have now outgrown.
And when we think about it, it's not really surprising that some of the rules we used to organize

society in the 7th century, or the 1st century, or the centuries before that, wouldn't really apply so much to the present day.

And when we look clearly at some of those same rules, it's relatively easy to see that although some are indeed based on experience and sound reasoning, some are also based on superstition, faulty reasoning, or archaic social customs and beliefs.

Take slavery, just for an example.
Slavery was still quite common in the world at those times, and it is mentioned many times in all three major monotheistic religious works.
And yet, Leviticus has hundreds of laws regarding various social norms, some of which involve the treatment of slaves, but there is not one law explicitly outlawing slavery.
The Koran also, although it encourages the freeing of slaves, never explicitly outlaws slavery either.

Whereas today, no rational, compassionate person can imagine any God that would ever approve of, or allow by omission, the enslavement of another human being.

So again, do social customs regarding slaves seem like something that was written by God? Or more likely, written by men, in a time when slavery was still seen as acceptable?

There's no need to go over all of the minutiae here though, just take a look at the texts and read with a critical eye.

These were not absolutely perfect people, writing absolutely perfect laws. They were a product of the time that they were in.

Context is important, as everything is to some degree a product of its own time and culture. Some wisdom is quite timeless, but in any huge religious text, written by human beings, there will often be some things that are wrong, and some things that may be the right thing at that particular time but which will not be necessary later down the line. Which is a good thing. Because it means we have evolved since then.

There can be great messages in religion, but when we get bogged down in literalism, we often miss the greater messages.

For example, literalism makes it difficult for us to acknowledge the possibility of metaphor in many places. So when we interpret a passage, we fail to see the metaphor, and we end up looking without, rather than looking within.

We also fail to recognize anomalies.
We don't recognize that, if a line goes directly against nearly everything else that someone said in their lifetime, then it is more likely an editorial drop-in or metaphor, rather than someone

directly contradicting their own values that they spent a lifetime teaching.

But instead, the absolutist in us often misses the metaphors, misses the anomalies, focuses instead on strict literalism, and thereby misses the vast heart of the message.

Most religions built on or borrowed from others, or in reaction to others. They weren't formed in a vacuum. Many religions have very significant similarities, although that certainly does not diminish their individual traditions any.
And like anything, religious texts are not perfect.
There is often wisdom and spiritual truth and divine inspiration, but there are also mistakes, ambiguities, contradictions, gaps, holes, history, myth, metaphors, poetry, and plenty of just flat out poor advice.
So there is always some interpretation involved.
And at the end of the day, some deciding of whether you truly believe your religion is a religion of love for all human beings or not.

Because you run into real problems, and real danger, when you don't balance a religious text with the reasonable thought in your own mind and the love in your own heart.

Since there are inconsistencies and contradictions in all religious texts, people tend to pick and choose passages based on what they want to feel. As usual, we see what we want to see. So if we feel anger or hatred or fear towards others who differ from us, then we quickly find passages in religious texts to justify those feelings.
But we usually do that by ignoring all of the other passages in that same text that lean in the opposite direction.
And most importantly, we ignore our own compassion and rationality, which let's not forget, were also God-given.

Religion can be a helpful guide for many people.
But in a pluralistic society, where many good people have many different faiths, simply saying "because this book says so" is just not an acceptable justification for something, especially if it is going to impact others negatively.
We have to show reason and compassion.
And at a certain point, we have to decide whether we want to define our religion as a religion of love for all humanity, or a religion of hatred for those who differ from us?
A religion that seeks equality, or a religion that condones inequality?
A religion of violence, or a religion of peace?

We are rarely able to recognize the learning process of our own religion, because we are so intent on keeping the psychological security of having the "absolute, unchanging final answer to everything."
We often don't want to let go of the psychological security of absolutism in an uncertain world.

But as any good teacher would tell you, learning is a process, not just following a list of instructions written by others.
Life is not a test of obedience, but a challenge to learn to develop a Loving Consciousness.

Perhaps that's one reason why religions and religious texts are never without their imperfections. Because in the end, we can't just be told, we have to choose on our own to evolve.

And as we evolve as spiritual beings, we may find that, while many of our religion's core beliefs of heart and wisdom are very valuable and even transcendent, others may be unnecessary or even hateful.

But thankfully, over long periods of time, ideas in religion also tend to gradually evolve.

And I would also make a suggestion...what if the heart of a religion, what matters most to God, actually has very little to do with whether you believe in one precept or another, and instead, has everything to do with how you treat your fellow human beings?

6. Christianity as often practiced.

There is so much compassion in the teachings of Jesus.
Unfortunately, many Christians have chosen to ignore those teachings.
Many have been so busy ritualizing the messenger and his death, that they have actually ignored the heart of the message.
For example, they can often describe his death in detail, but they have no real understanding of the Sermon on the Mount.

This is what could be called Lip Sync Christianity.
It's when people recite the teachings of Jesus in church, but have little understanding or care for most of it, and certainly choose not to live by the compassionate example that he set.
So instead, they mouth the words on Sunday, and then the rest of week they just gather wealth and judge others, rather than love their fellow human beings.

The world needs more Red Letter Christians. Christians who pay much more attention to the words that Jesus actually *spoke* when teaching than anything else.
As such, the Synoptic Gospels should be foundational for Christians, rather than frequently cited verses in the Bible spoken by people *other* than Jesus, verses that typically get used whenever our personal prejudices find them convenient.

Jesus clearly glimpsed the divine in everyone.
Love your neighbor, even your enemy, as you would yourself.

How can one claim to love God, but not their own spiritual brother?
Despite the fact that God put us here to learn to do just that?

It's no coincidence that so much of Jesus's teaching revolved around the downtrodden and those in need of help.

Somewhere right now, someone is cold, hungry, violent, uneducated, mistreated, unhappy...and that person is actually your spiritual brother or sister.

"Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25:45)

But instead, Christians have often been targeting the *most* vulnerable people in society.
Is targeting these people really representing Jesus's priorities?
Or is it all just about self-interest and taxes?

Because on most of the issues Christians are concerned with these days, Jesus showed no interest in whatsoever.
To include taxes.

Jesus sat down to meals with tax collectors, who were often the most reviled by those around him, and when pressed on taxes he said, yeah, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's." (Mark 12:17)
In other words, yes, pay your taxes.
It was clearly nowhere near his list of priorities.
There may not have been anyone who cared *less* about taxes.
And yet taxes are often many Christians' top priority, even when weighed against clear social injustices, which would suggest nothing but pure self-interest.
The exact opposite of what Jesus taught.

And Jesus's lessons about the downtrodden have typically been ignored in favor of simply consolidating more wealth, often while using the implied justification that wealth must mean one is "blessed" by God, rather than simply advantaged by economics.

Since when do we *really* care about others, who aren't us or in our own family?
And can one name any times when Jesus put himself or even his own family in front of the rest of humanity?
Especially those struggling the most?

We all have some degree of self-interest, for sure, but when that alone starts to dominate *all* of our decisions and views and actions, then we really start to get off track.

In the important choice between the unending empathy and compassion that follows Jesus's example...or pure self-interest.....many Christians have been choosing the latter.

Catholic Christians have certainly had issues with this as well, but really, for Protestant Christians, a lot of this can be traced back to the influence of theologian Martin Luther. His 95 Theses were indeed a pretty good move away from church corruption at the time. But in his later life, and still in his haste to get away from a corrupt church, he really over corrected...and stated his idea of "salvation by Faith Alone," and that basically, good works don't really matter.
Which is the exact *opposite* of what Jesus taught.
But that misguided theory eventually became very foundational for Protestant and thereby Evangelical denominations, which make up most American Christian denominations today.

It was the idea that all that really matters is that you believe in God and Jesus as divine, and maybe try to get others to do the same, but that you don't really have to *do* much else.
That you don't have to do the work.
Like somehow, being truly empathetic and compassionate and following Jesus's example, is all just so...unnecessary.

But good works matter.
You can't just mouth the words one day a week.

You have to put your money where your mouth is.
You have to actually walk the walk.

We all know it's much easier to love a concept of God in your mind, than it is to love the human beings who are here, but that second one is exactly what Jesus was teaching us to do.
Based on his actions and his teachings, loving and doing good works for other human beings actually mattered as *much* as anything else.
And so that's what Jesus dedicated his life to teaching humanity.
Otherwise, if it was unnecessary...he wouldn't have bothered.

When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was…he in fact listed *Two* Commandments.
The First was to love God. And the Second was to "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)
And he always tied those two, most important, commandments *together*.
And yet many Christians have been ignoring an entire half of what he said was *most* important to do, and most of what he taught.
Many Christians seem to be under the impression, conveniently supported by pure self-interest, that all of that work that he taught you to do to love and help others...is just unnecessary.

But a path led by pure self-interest, and a path laid down by Jesus's compassion, are going in the exact *opposite* directions.

Jesus's teachings revolve around empathy and compassion.

Say what you want about some of the frequent hypocrisy in the practice of Christianity today, but Jesus himself in his life and teachings set an example of unconditional love that really has echoed through time.
And say what you want about hypocritical acts committed in the name of Christ since the time of Jesus (and there would be plenty to say), but the fact remains that the introduction to humanity of the lesson to "love thy enemy" and the depth of compassion and empathy he exhibited in his teachings was a revolutionary moment in human history.

And that kind of deep compassion is something that is beyond the jurisdictional claims of Christianity or any other religion, because it is a concept so important that it transcends religion. It simply belongs to any human being who sees the truth of it.

It's not unlike how the life of Gautama Buddha was a milestone in humanity's history of learning to meditate and control one's own mind.

The love, compassion, and empathy that Jesus taught are human values that are beyond any religious boundaries.

You don’t have to be Christian or Buddhist or even religious at all to see the incredible contributions that these beings made to humanity’s learning curve.

7. Apocalyptic Beliefs

In every single era, there have been people who believed that the end of the world was upon them.
The problem is, people who behave like there's going to be an Apocalypse soon, and almost seem to want it, often do little to prevent it.
So it becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, and is used as an excuse to do less.
"I believe the world will end, and I kind of want it to, so I'm going to do little to help prevent that from happening."

But one of the problems with that reasoning is, what if you're wrong?
Now you've just helped make the world a little worse, and then next year rolls around, and guess what? We all still live here.

Rather than have everything suddenly resolved for us from on high, what if it's up to us to make this place better first?

What if the point is not for us to destroy our world in insanity, but to actually work together to make things better?

That way, whether the world ends or not, whether our beliefs are illusory or not, either way, things are still better.

8. Religious violence

How many tricks of the mind keep us human beings fighting one another...

We fight over dirt and rocks like they are divinity, but if we really had a sense of divinity, we would not be fighting our brother at all.

If your religious views are conflicting with your love for all humanity, then you're probably on the wrong track.

If you do right by one another, then you do right by God.
If you love one another, by doing so, you love God.
Because as they say, God is love, and we are the children of God.

Who you are praying to is probably of less importance than what you are praying for. If you're praying for the death of your fellow human beings, then you're off-track no matter who you're praying to.
God didn't create and love human beings in order for them to destroy each other.
God did not put human beings here, in all of their diversity, to kill one other.

[Holy Wars]

The Christian Crusades and Islamic Jihads lasted hundreds of years, and didn't solve much of anything except to get a lot of people killed. Do we really want history to repeat itself?

Islam, Christianity, others...there are extreme fundamentalists of all religions.
Every religion has its miracles, its martyrs, and its murderers.

And extreme fundamentalism is often a reaction to uncertainty and fear.
"I have a set list of rules here, and that is what I will follow, and that is how the world should be, and anything else that isn't like that scares me and I will have to destroy it."
Add in situations of poverty, violence, insecurity, and sometimes legitimate social injustice, and you have some of the same contributors to gang environments, only now extended to religion.

But any religious text can be manipulated in any way, so therefore, you have to also use the compassion and reason that God gave you.

Because it is essential to have belief without fanaticism if you're going to live with other human beings on this planet.

But instead, we've got men pretending to act as the enforcer of God's mind. And guess what? You're not. You're just the enforcer of some human man's idea of God, and now you've gone

and murdered someone because of it.

Those who murder other human beings in the name of God will probably be very disappointed when their choices on Earth are reviewed in any afterlife.
Because you didn't actually murder for God, you simply murdered.

We are not the enforcer of God's will.
Leave God's Will to God.
We are here to learn to love one another, not kill one another.

There are roughly 8 billion people on the planet right now. To win a Holy War, you would basically have to kill everyone else in the world, which is insane, not to mention impossible. Seriously, what's the end game? Kill 7 billion people? You're hilarious.

With 8 billion people on the planet, if your goal was to end ways of life that simply differ from your own, then that war would never end.
And do you think God put us here together to kill each other forever?
Or to learn *not* to?

Like most wars, a Holy War is not a war anyone can "win," except by not fighting it.
You really cannot eradicate those who have different religious views than your own, only kill your own human brothers.

There used to be an excellent Islamic tradition of forbidding violence during Ramadan. However, it would be encouraging to see it more broadly recognized that killing a human being is a truly unsacred act any time of year.
Similarly, Christians have often paid lip service to the Nonviolence in Jesus's teachings, but many have never had the courage to actually embrace it.
And if there was one thing that scares the hell out of anyone who wants to see humanity keep fighting forever, it would be Nonviolence.

But unfortunately, humanity has shown on multiple occasions that we are so afraid of change, that sometimes we would rather kill others than change ourselves. But we need to end that cycle.

We need to learn that a Holy War is an oxymoron, that there is no such thing as a Holy War, only yet another Human War...and that is always unholy.

9. Spirituality and Religion

You can have spirituality without religion. You can also have religion without much spirituality. Spirituality and religion are not necessarily the same thing, although they are not mutually exclusive in any way.

There are many religious people who are highly spiritual and enlightened.
There are also many highly spiritual and enlightened people who are not specifically religious.

And there are people who have no spiritual beliefs at all, but who, like most people, love human beings simply because they do, and want society to be happy and peaceful.

All around the world, people feel that loving connection that exists between all of us in the human spiritual family, regardless of belief system, and recognize that it is far more important than any of the other details that we tend to fight over.

10. Bodhisattva Consciousness

There is a concept that is useful for anyone to know, and that is the concept of the Bodhisattva Consciousness.

In many forms of Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is a being who has reached high levels of enlightenment and has boundless compassion.
And because of that endless compassion, a Bodhisattva chooses to delay any final enlightenment or more permanent heavenly state, and instead chooses to keep returning to Earth in order to help all other beings also reach enlightenment.

That is the Bodhisattva Consciousness. Unconditional, boundless compassion leading one to continue to return to help others.

Many believe that Jesus was a Bodhisattva.
Others simply prefer to use the term Christ Consciousness, as Jesus exhibited that same type of boundless compassion and unconditional love and was here to help others reach enlightenment.

Bodhisattva Consciousness and Christ Consciousness are both terms for the same type of divine consciousness. It is defined by a boundless, unconditional love for all of the people around us. Not just ourselves or our own family, but everyone.
And it is defined by choosing to continue to help others, even when self-interest might dictate otherwise.

And in the end, a Bodhisattva will leave no one behind.
Would God do anything less? Abandon a spirit when there is infinite time to learn?

And so Bodhisattvas continue to return to help us all reach our higher states of being and compassion.
Many of the greatest teachers, guides, and prophets that we have had in the world, irrespective of religion, if they were working towards humanity evolving a more loving consciousness, then they were probably in the Bodhisattva category.
Many were not even aware of that status, except on a higher level. They simply sought to help make the world a better and more compassionate place.

But that kind of loving consciousness, that kind of compassion, is something that we can all reach.
And something that the world needs.

That Bodhisattva Consciousness within each of us.

11. Choice

We are all capable of both the best and worst in ourselves.
We all have that choice. Every day.

Where you are born does not determine who you are, or how you will be.
You, each day, choose what kind of person you will be.

12. Malicious Choices and the Learning Process

Life is a mix of both free will and planning, and our experiences here may be very difficult at times, but at the end of the day, regardless of circumstances, it is our choices that matter. Our choices are what define who we are.

I don't believe in damnation, but I do believe there is an accounting. There is a record. And any malicious acts not only make it harder on others, but also harder on ourselves both in this life and the next time around.
We essentially make our own learning more difficult and have to stay in school longer. And for those who have committed truly horrific crimes, it's often a long, hard road back to humanity. When they reach real understanding of what it is that they've done, that alone is a suffering state, or a type of hell if you will, and working one's way back from that spiritual state to being an evolved human being is no enviable task. Working one's way back from inhumanity, working one's way back from madness, trying to make amends and learn to be a better human being again, that entire process is a long, hard road. God's love may be endlessly forgiving and unconditional, but that doesn't mean you aren't going to have some seriously difficult re-education.

I don't believe in karma as a never-ending "got you last" sort of situation, but I do believe our acts, positive or negative, have consequences, and those consequences do tend to come around again in our learning process. And so our actions and choices do make things harder or easier for our own spiritual evolution.

13. Forgiveness of self

We all make mistakes and poor choices.
But when we make a bad decision, then we learn from the mistake, move on, and try not to repeat it.
And if we hurt others, then we try to make up for it if at all possible.
We can't live in regret or guilt, as we need to love ourselves as well as others, but if a poor decision in our past gives us even more motivation to make things better for others in the future, then okay.

As for really terrible actions...
One thing that often happens with terrible actions is that people who have committed them can't quite own up to the truth of what they've done, and so they continue down the same path in a kind of resigned denial. There is a mentality of, "I can never make up for it, I feel terrible within, so I might as well just embrace that."
But what they forget is that, even with truly horrible actions, it just takes one moment to start walking back.
The journey from being a murderer to being a Buddha begins with just one choice.
You can always come back.
It may be a long, hard road back. But it starts with just one step.

The human soul is inviolable. Any light that has been covered up can always eventually be uncovered again. And all it takes to start on a different path is one step in that direction.
No one is ruined forever and ever.
I don't believe in eternal damnation, but I do believe in consequences, and the long learning process that can be made even longer and more difficult for ourselves by our own actions. And it may be a very long, hard road back to one's true self, but that's still better than the emptiness that we felt before we started our way back.
We can all have forgiveness when needed, but we have to earn it. We can't just pass the responsibility to something or someone else as a substitute in our place. In one lifetime or more, we have to do the work.
We have to recognize our mistakes or bad choices that have hurt others, do whatever we can to amend them, and work hard to live better for everyone.

14. Forgiveness

We tend to think it's just about forgiveness from God.
Probably because that's really vague and therefore easier for us.

But it's more about forgiveness of each other.

15. The Soul is Inviolable.

Your soul is inviolable.
No matter what you go through in life, it can never be ruined or damaged at all. Not by others, not by you.
The soul can only be temporarily covered up and hidden by those who are trying to ignore the light within themselves. And they fail in the end as well.

16. Being Introspective

Being introspective is a very important part of being an evolving human being.

Asking ourselves those questions...why do I do what I do, is this good or not, are my reasons good or not, are there other better options, etc.
It's vital to not just see the world and question it, but to also see and question ourselves.
It's not about fixing everyone else all the time, as we also need to "Be the change we wish to see in the world." And in order to do that, we have to be introspective.

And it is not selfish to work on the self, it is actually essential.
Being introspective as individuals and as a society is how we learn, how we adjust, how we teach ourselves to be better.

17. The Heart and The Head. And the Compass.

It's important to balance one's heart and one's head, to try to put them in sync with one another. When we make choices with both our heart and head together, we often make our best choices.

But when in real doubt...follow your heart.
We might use the heart and head together, but always remember to check with your heart both first and last.

Human beings have been neglecting that step for a long time, and it has really cost us.

Because your heart is really your internal compass.

Compass...Compassion...that's not just a coincidence.

For those who believe that the divine is essentially Love, compassion will always point you towards true north.

If you are led by your love for all humanity, and you use wisdom to adjust, you really can't go too far wrong.

So follow your Compass-ion.

18. Paths through the Wilderness

The paths through the wilderness is a metaphor for the individual spiritual journey we each take. We all take our individual journey, and go through our individual evolution, at the same time as humanity as a whole learns and evolves together.
And so while we help each other and the world, we are also walking our own individual path of learning.

Although we sometimes try to tear each other down for that, which is curious, because all paths disappear into the woods at some point or another, and you can never really see the end of a particular path, so to look over at someone and attack them for having a different path is quite absurd. We come from the same place, and we're eventually going to the same place. But instead of appreciating our different paths and meeting each other in joy, we often just fight about it.

But diversity is good. Diversity is one of the keys for humanity learning from one another.
There is not just one path for everyone. So if someone is not hurting anyone else on their particular path, then to each their own.
We all march to the beat of our own drummer.

As for our own wandering, we may run into dead ends sometimes. We may make mistakes. We may choose paths that we gradually realize don't work for us.
That's okay.
We are not infallible. When we make mistakes, we learn from them, and we move on.
All heroes get sidetracked from time to time.

There are challenges and obstacles in each path, and many of them are there for a reason, and they often help us learn.
So we have to have patience.
We're all walking there together. Different friends may walk us with us at different times, but eventually we'll all get there together.

We may even see guideposts, or meet guides, that help us find our way.
But in the end, it's our path, and we must walk it with our own choices.

And like on many journeys, sometimes we spend a lot of time traipsing about the wilderness until we find somewhere recognizable.
That's okay. Learning what we don't want to do can sometimes be just as valuable as learning what we do.
Sometimes we even get lost in a way that we ultimately meant to.
So it's important to have an appreciation for the journey of life, rather than just a particular goal. The journey matters as much, if not more than, the destination.

We may at times encounter challenges. But everything in its own time. We get there when we get there. The journey is the important part, and every step along the path is an opportunity for us, and holds the possibility for learning.
When in doubt, stick to the paths with heart. Follow your compass-ion. And enjoy the journey.

19. Soul Friends

We walk life's paths with a lot of different people at different times.
And among them, we often have a closer group of soul friends or kindred spirits who we go through much of life with.

That group is usually made up of our friends, and sometimes our family, and sometimes people we've known for a long time, and sometimes people who are fairly new to us. Often it includes those we have romantic relationships with in our lives, and sometimes they stay for a long time, and sometimes they shift to just being friends, which is not that big of a difference as far as soul friends goes.
And often among this group, our soul friends may need to take different paths for a while to learn different things, so they may move away for a bit, or even disappear around the bend for a while, to be seen again at some point later.
But as a group, soul friends are here to help each other learn, and just to enjoy exploring this journey of life together.

20. Meditation

The mind does require some training and self-control.
You have to be able to take the reins of your own mind, and not let your own thoughts just run you ragged.
And meditation is one type of training that helps us do that.

Meditation helps us slow down, think clearly, be calm, and quiet the inner monologue when needed.
It helps us learn how to balance and handle our own minds.

There are a lot of different methods of meditation...transcendental, mantras, passages, reflection, zazen, chanting, breathing, vibrational, among others. Some people prefer to combine movement or exercise with meditation. Some people focus on physical tasks. Some people use relaxing music.
Any of these methods can be helpful, just depending on what works for you.

However, if your mind is behaving the exact same way as it does during the rest of the day, then a particular method may not be helping much.
Because it's not the same as just relaxing, as you can do that pretty much any time. Instead, you have to actually choose to take that time to both calm yourself and train your mind some.
You have to be able to say, "I'm only going to focus on this one simple thing for the next half hour, as I train my mind to quiet itself, let distractions go, and focus just as I want."

And distractions may arise, from your thoughts or from the outside world, but you dismiss them and let them drift away just as quickly.

It takes practice.
But your mind will be clearer for it. You will find that it is easier to focus when you want, and you will feel calmer overall.

We could probably all find it useful. Meditation is something that can help us calm and focus our minds no matter who we are, where we're from, or what we believe.
And in today's world, where technology has facilitated a constant stream of hyperstimulation and ADHD is running rampant, meditation has probably never been more needed.

Because it's difficult to get really clear, deep thought when we can't even slow down or focus.
And as evolving spiritual beings, we definitely need the ability to have clear, deep thought.

So meditation is an essential tool in taking hold of the reins again and training our minds.
Once we begin to do that, we often find a clearer, more capable mind and a calmer peace within.

21. Thoughts in meditation.

During meditation, if your thoughts disturb you, just let them pass by like waves on an ocean, until they roll on and out of sight.

We all have thoughts during meditation, some great and some not so great.
So if you have thoughts that disturb you too much, don't beat yourself up over it, as we all have bad thoughts from time to time. But we eventually realize their falsehood, that they are not us and do not define us, and that random thoughts are far less important than our actions.
Our choices, our actions are what define how we exist in this world, and whether we make it a better place or not.
So just let those thoughts pass by, like waves on an ocean. And then return to your self.

22. ADHD

ADHD, or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, has become a real problem today.

ADHD would maybe be useful if your only job was to constantly multitask and track two dozen things at once in a nonstop, chaotic environment for the duration of your life. But most of our lives thankfully aren't like that.
So instead, ADHD often just keeps our attention scattered and distracted.
It can be a hindrance to our ability to have calm, sustained focus and the kind of deep thought that we need to have as human beings.

Part of the reason it has become so common is that we have developed a culture that fosters hyperstimulation.

We are constantly prodded by "urgent" updates, that of course, are nowhere near urgent.
We are fed a stream of constant entertainment and advertising, often with shorter and shorter cuts to generate a reaction and match our reduced attention span.
Add in a heavy dose of stimulants like caffeine and sugar (which many of us were raised on), and you have a pretty good recipe to create hyperstimulated consumers.

Nearly every minute of our day is now filled with constant updates, entertainment content, and advertising.
It has become tougher and tougher to slow down enough to actually contemplate or meditate on anything with that constant stream always running in the foreground.

Like most things, technology can be a useful tool, for example, with things like information or entertainment or communication.
And like most things, it's fine in moderation.
It's not technology, so much as how we use it.

Since it's not human, technology has exactly zero attention span. Think about that. Your tv, your phone, has no attention span and doesn't care about an attention span, it just feeds on whatever constant stream of information is sent to it.
So, if you are plugged into that...then that's exactly what you are getting as well. Which, being that you're a human being, is not necessarily all that good for your mind.

When our lives are tethered to technology so much, always being prodded by content that demands our attention, we often miss out on opportunities for deeper connections to the world around us, to each other, and to our inner self.
And in the long run, those deeper connections are so much more important to your development as a human being than whether you hear about some new video a day later or not.

The easiest test these days is to just see how long we usually go without looking at our phones. It's a good test of our habits to see if we really have time for our own thoughts and experiences, or if the rhythm of our life is dictated by technology.

If you can't even get half an hour to yourself, then that's a sign.

We need time to ourselves, to be able to have our own thoughts and experiences, unplugged from other content constantly jutting in.
Having space for our own thoughts and experiences is *essential* to our spiritual evolution.

We don't need to be anti-technology by any means, as technology can be very useful, but we do need to recognize that they are just tools, and not things that should end up controlling us, as they often do.
So sometimes that means just turning the tv off or putting the phone down. We've got to be able to unplug from technology sometimes.
We need to humanize our use of technology, instead of trying to technologize humanity.
Be wary of the idea that human beings need accessories to live well here. You were born with all that you needed to develop as a human being and to learn to help the world and enjoy yourself while doing it. So don't get too sidetracked.

We are still learning, but our hyperstimulation habits and conditioning are starting to make it much more difficult for us to maintain the calm, sustained focus that we sometimes need.
Put another way, it's difficult to be enlightened if you can never even slow down enough to have the type of deep thoughts, moments, and realizations that would get you there.

So don't let your attention be distracted and scattered in too many ways, too much of the time.
Don't fall for the ruse that a hyperstimulated consumer lifestyle is some kind of necessity.
If you do feel out of balance, unplug from technology some, try some more balanced habits, and practice some meditation to help bring your mind back to center.

Most of all, practice your ability to have a calm, clear, and focused mind.

23. Wisdom vs. Knowledge

There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.

Where humanity has succeeded at gaining knowledge, we have often failed at gaining wisdom. And there is a big difference between the simple accumulation of knowledge, and using that knowledge wisely.

In many ways, wisdom has to be learned by experience on an individual level, but one problem is that humanity as a whole needs to learn by experience as well. And we have not been doing that.

We haven't been learning from our history, seeing the root causes, seeing the patterns and cycles repeating themselves, and thinking deeply about how we can do things differently and better.

Another problem is that even when we have learned, we have often failed to teach those lessons to the next generation.
And since humanity doesn't hold on to the lesson, we end up just continuing that cycle of forgetting and repeating, forgetting and repeating.
So we're learning, slowly, but it's often a case of two steps forward, one step back.
But rather than continue that endless cycle of forgetting lessons and repeating mistakes, we need to make humanity's learning more sustainable.
We need to do a much better job of learning, as well as maintaining what we have learned, so that we are passing on not just knowledge, but also insight.

24. Optimism vs. Cynicism

There are those who will try to tell you that it cannot be done, that we cannot make the world a better place.
Prove them wrong.

You may hear phrases like, “Oh, it’ll never happen,” or “That’s just how things are,” but don’t let naysayers crush your hopes and your desire to make the world a better place.
Something may be very difficult, or it may take a long, long time, but that’s okay, most of humanity’s learning experience here is a long process anyway. And if it is a good thing that is meant to be, then nothing is an impossibility.

We need to watch out for those traps of mistrust, paranoia, and cynicism. Part of the challenge of life here is learning to deal with disappointment and still not lose our faith and love in one another and the world.
Pragmatism can certainly have a useful, practical application. Cynicism, however, is usually not particularly useful.

Don’t buy into the cynical belief that, “Hey, we’re all just broken and screwed up, and the world is broken and screwed up, so just accept it because that’s the way it is.” That argument is often just a trap to get you to give up or sell out.

And that kind of cynicism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. People are told that the world “just is how it is,” so then they don’t believe the world can get any better, so they never push to make it better, and so it rarely does.
In contrast, optimism actually helps positive change happen. Because positive change always begins with people first believing that it is possible.

So never give up the belief in the possibility of a better world.

25. The Real Game

[Bread and Circus]

Entertainment itself can be a double-edged sword.
Entertainment can certainly be interesting, inspiring, enlightening even, and just really fun.
But we can also become such consumers of entertainment that it becomes the primary focus of our lives.
And at that point, it becomes just a Bread and Circus type of distraction.

So many of us now spend such a significant amount of our lives just being entertained.
Entertainment has become such a pre-eminent focus that it's like many of us have forgotten why we're actually here. We just want to sit on the couch and continue being entertained.

And so it becomes like Bread and Circus. Keep them entertained, and not too hungry. Give them streaming cell phones and snacks, and most of them will never put much real effort into fixing humanity's problems.
Just keep them distracted, and they'll never really get their act together.

Entertainment can be great, but there is also much, much more to life than just being entertained.
But many of us now settle for the temporary pleasures so much, the so-called opiates of the masses, that we never really push to make the world better like we could.

Don't let yourself forget why you're here.

[The Real Game]

We keep looking towards entertainment for the great challenging storyline, but we're actually already a part of one.
And it's much more challenging than any story or game we've ever seen.

You want an epic story? Welcome to humanity's struggle to get our act together. It's been going on for millennia.

But we've been ignoring our own epic story, to instead just be entertained by imaginary ones.

So if you're bored, don't just daydream about being in a great story, live it.

Because we need all the help we can get.

And wouldn't it be great if your life was more motivating than your television?

We need to be less of a voyeur culture and instead more of a proactive culture. We need less watching and being entertained, and more actually taking part in the real story and playing the real game, this huge task of making the world a better place.

Don't let your life pass you by, and then when the time comes to leave, realize that you never did all that you could have done while you were here on Earth.
Don't allow yourself to be distracted, kept on the sidelines, out of the real game.

[Balance]

There is a balance, obviously.
We all want to enjoy our lives, and most of us like entertainment, and we all need some downtime and distraction sometimes.

But it's also important to ask ourselves from time to time, just on a personal level, how is that balance?
Is there too much distraction? Am I still trying to make this world a better place as much as I could?

Stories and sport and games can definitely be inspiring, entertaining, interesting, and fun. But when they become the primary focus of our lives, they can also distract us from the very important work we have to do here.
A lot of the reason many of us feel so unfulfilled in life is that we are not actually doing what we're here to do.
We're not helping much, we're not learning all that much, we're not working to come together, we're just spending our days working, consuming, and watching tv.

[Adjust the Ratio]

We'll always have entertainment, which is good, but what if we simply adjusted the ratio some?

What if we took just some of the *massive* amount of time and energy we now put into being entertained...and instead put that towards actually helping each other make the world a better place?

Imagine the possibilities.

We are in the process of evolving as spiritual beings together, and we just aren't going to get there by spending most of our time in front of a screen.

Entertainment is valuable, but we don't want to ever be so distracted by entertainment that we lose track of our purpose here.

26. Do What You Can.

We may not be able to do everything, and we may not be able to do it all on our own. But we do what we can.

We each do what we can to make the world a better place. And together, we make progress.

Only we know if we're really doing all that we can.
If something is important, then work hard, try to tough it out. You'll often be glad that you did. And many others may be glad as well.

And don't forget, intention matters.
There is always an effect. Even when something doesn't seem to change anything, the effect is often unseen, even if it's just one more push for the universe in the right direction.
When you make a choice, your choice matters.
If nothing else, it matters to you.

Big or small contributions, they're all important. We all have a purpose here, a role in making this world a better place.

So do what you can.

27. Patience

Patience.

Everything in its own time.

28. Light Touch

When trying to awaken, teach, or help others, it's important to use patience, not force. Remember to use a Light Touch.

Ego and righteousness sometimes influence our actions too much, but you have to remember that you can't force your vision upon the world of the "right way," no matter what it is. It can only be explained clearly and offered freely.
People either see the truth of something, or they don't. But either way, free will is essential to all of our learning.

Which doesn't mean that you give up, or that you don't persist in working hard to make the world a better place. It just means that spiritual evolution can't be forced. It's a process.

In the meantime, we continue to work hard to help. And we continue to offer light and love to the world around us.

29. Being on your own.

It’s important to be alright on your own. To be okay with being alone.
The skill is highly useful for your own thoughts and activities, as well as for being in good relationships when you’re not alone.

So you have to be able to handle being alone, and be just fine.

We can’t do everything on our own, nor should we, as we’re here in this life to live and learn together.
But for our own personal path, it’s important to learn to do things on our own.

30. Travel

Travel and cultural learning are wonderful.
And sometimes we even go somewhere else physically, in order to go somewhere else mentally or spiritually.

But also, as the saying goes, “Wherever you go, there you are.”
Wherever in the world you may be, your home is always within.

31. Stories

The stories or archetypes that society tells us can sometimes be very useful learning tools, and sometimes not at all.
So remember that whether you find particular stories useful or not, at the end of the day, you will find your own path.

32. Mysticism

If at some point you find yourself on a path that includes mystical experience, there can be a place for that, but there are also some helpful things to remember.

First, remember to stay true to your heart, your love of all people, and to balance your experiences with both your heart and your head.

If you find your life has moments of serendipity or synchronicity, if they are helpful, then enjoy them. Often in life, we find what we need when we really need it.

As for the allies or tricksters that can sometimes be found on mystic journeys, just keep sensible limits. Remember to use your head and your heart. Use your awareness and intuition to recognize negative energy and a good or bad education. And know how to say no. It's good to be open to possibility, but don't just be constantly led along in confusion.
It can be enjoyable to just follow your intuition for a while sometimes, but don't forget to always balance with your heart and your common sense.

And remember to ground yourself sometimes.
People who have mystical experiences can kind of run themselves ragged at times. Often they get caught up in their own thoughts or experiences way too much, and so they become too disconnected from the people or the world around them, or even themselves.
Mystical experiences can be useful, but only if you learn something from them.
Because if you completely lose your mind, then it doesn't really do you or anyone else much good, does it?
Sometimes one has to go off and do things on their own in these types of experiences, but you don't want to be on your own so much that you become completely disconnected from everyone else who is here on Earth with you.
You don't want to forget that we are all spiritually connected and here in this life together.
So keeping your feet on the ground sometimes is important. Just don't forget to do things that help you feel grounded, and that you enjoy.

At times a mystic journey may also lead one into the wilderness, but sometimes that's useful.
That's actually another reason to make sure that we keep wilderness, not only for the other life forms we share the earth with and for our own ecosystems, which are incredibly important, but also for our own experiences with the unknown.
Nature has an energy to it, something refreshing, invigorating, and essential, and so when we lose wilderness, we lose something vital.

As for the tricks or tools of one's imagination that someone on a mystic journey may sometimes use to further their experience, that can be alright too.
As long as you are not hurting others or yourself with it, then your imagination is simply another tool you can use to navigate a mystical experience. So if something works for you, then it works

for you.
As for dreams and other types of perception, we just need to always remember to balance those experiences with our head and our heart.
And sometimes what mentally works for us now may not work or be necessary for us later, much like metaphorical tools that we pick up and put down as needed.
And it's also helpful to know that, given the flexibility of the mind, we can generally always find our way back from the mental places that we have been.

Sometimes when dealing with mystical experiences, people get so amazed or intrigued or distracted by an experience that they forget the purpose of the experiences themselves.
The main purpose of the experience is to see the world from a slightly different perspective in order to learn some possible (not guaranteed, but possible) insight. So if you have a mystical experience, certainly enjoy and appreciate that, but don't forget why we have them. Remember that we are here to learn to live together and to make the world a better place for all of us, so never forget to balance your experiences with both your head and your heart.

33. Questioning

Don’t be afraid to question anything and everything.

Always, always ask why.

To be unquestioning is a foolish and dangerous way to live. It’s our job to question everything. There is no learning, no understanding, without questioning.

We should be comfortable with questioning authority, and questioning the status quo, whenever needed.
Those who discourage questioning are often just trying to hide fault or insecurity or to maintain power. Because to discourage questioning is to discourage understanding.

We may not always get an answer for our questions. And we may not always have an answer for those asked of us either. So don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.” Any wise person has to be able to say, “I don’t know” sometimes.

But we all must be thinkers, questioners.
It’s a key to understanding and choosing for oneself.

34. Challenging Lessons

People or things that challenge us can certainly be useful for learning.

Sometimes people will challenge us, even annoy or anger us, but then later we find that if we allow the waves to pass, are patient, and think...we often realize something, learn something, or think about something that we might not have otherwise.
And there is value in that.

35. Ego

Often there is a good balance to be found between self-confidence and humility. It's a balance between being confident in your capabilities or possibilities, but also recognizing that there are limits to what a person can and should do.

Sometimes we make things more about ourselves than what's good for everyone. And so it's good to be aware if we are letting our ego take over too much. Because often we need less ego, and more selflessness. After all, there is much, much more in existence than just our own egos.

So, while it's good to be self-confident, sometimes you just have to laugh, and not take yourself too seriously.

36. Wealth

We often get so impressed by wealth, or success, or power.
But those things don't guarantee wisdom, or virtue. Often far from it.
Even skill and intelligence are worth relatively little without compassion.

If for some reason you had to choose between being rich or being good, which would you choose?

37. Truth and Reality

False news, false information, false scripted realities, false AI-generated content...

It’s much tougher for human beings to learn, if we can’t even tell what’s real or what’s true.

Make truth and reality the absolute standard.

Anything less just hinders humanity.

38. Body, Mind, and Soul

It's important to try to have a good balance of body, mind, and soul.

The inner soul may be the most important overall, but the body is the vehicle that carries our spirit in this lifetime, and the mind is the tool we use to understand and navigate this world.

Learning, meditation, healthy eating, exercise, all these types of things can help keep our minds and bodies fit.

Whether it's physical activities or mental activities, laughter, friends, the simple power of human touch, or just talking with others to get an outside perspective and not feel caught up in our own thoughts so much...do the things that make you feel happy, that make you feel clear headed, that make you feel good, and that make you feel present.

Because when we have a good balance of all three, body, mind, and soul, we often feel our best.

39. Veganism/Vegetarianism

There is an argument to be made that, as we expand our circle of compassion and empathy to sentient beings other than ourselves, our diet preferences may change.
But we do what we can, when we can.
Many human beings are not even in a physical location where they could make that change at present. So if there were to be a change, it would be gradual.
But the question of whether we need to kill a sentient being in order to survive is an important one to consider.

40. Trying and Failing

Part of life is learning to deal with challenges.

When you feel like things aren't working out, and you feel frustrated, just remain true to yourself, and things will often work out eventually.

Sometimes we might fall on the journey, but we just keep getting up off the ground and walking on.

We learn from our mistakes and disappointments, and we don't let them define us.

There are a lot of difficult lessons along the journey for every one of us.
It's a challenging process, for sure, but it's also a rewarding one.

41. Feeling alone, and difficult times

We all feel alone sometimes.
Sometimes we may even feel alone in a crowd, and that's okay, but we also need to recognize that we're never truly alone. We're actually surrounded by friends, some old, some new, and some we just haven't met yet. So if you get caught up in sadness, then appreciate the moment, and everyone around you. Have fun, and don't fall for the illusion that you are isolated. We all take different paths sometimes, but we're also all on this journey together. We just forget sometimes.

And while struggling with the challenge of living on this planet, you're going to have some sleepless nights here and there. And maybe even some very dark times. But just hold on, relax, and breathe. When you feel despair, sometimes you fight it off and sometimes you kind of wait it out, but either way, shine from within and just hold on. All of us, we're here with you.
And don't be afraid to ask for help if it's available, which it often is. We can all use help sometimes. We are here in this life together.
Just don't give into the coercion of despair. You will be alright. And the world will be alright with you.
Sometimes, when it feel like the waves are hitting from all sides, you just have to hold onto the love in your heart and mind. The human spirit is never really alone or unloved, from the darkest prison cell to the highest mountain top. And sometimes we have to just keep holding on while the storm passes, but eventually it passes, and then we move on.
We have all wavered in the dark of night sometimes, but we hold on, keep breathing, try to get some sleep, and the next day, the morning finally dawns, the sun shines out and warms our face, dispelling our fears, and we remember who we are and how we choose to live in this world.

You'd be amazed at how you can bounce back.
When you're feeling broken, you're not, you're just a little bent out of shape maybe. But we human beings have an amazing mental strength to us, so even if we are a little bent out of shape, we can just bend right back.

And the human spirit itself is inviolable, so remember *who you are*. Sometimes people help shine a light on our path, but the real reason we can walk through the darkness is because we are all lit from within.
And sometimes it's one step at a time for a while, but we keep moving forward, and eventually our way begins to clear again.
And if we see someone else falling, then we reach out a hand.
So if the world seems dark at times, then be the light you wish to see in the world.

Be like the Bodhisattva who touches his finger to the ground, to say, "I have the right to exist on this planet, in this time, and to help others until my time comes."

Sometimes we even have difficult times that we can't see any reason for, and then much later, we

realize that those times enabled us to reach, inspire, or help people whom we never would have been able to reach otherwise.

We all get down sometimes, but just remember who you are, and who we all are together. Take strength from that light within, which can never be lost, and know that it will be alright.

42. Fear

Fear is a strange thing, as it all takes place in our mind, like an illusion we have to dispel.

We may never completely get rid of all of our fears, like the fear of death upon which most fears are based, but the important thing is to not be controlled by our fears.

Don't let your fear or imagination control you.
You keep the reins on your mind, not the other way around.
And once again, meditation can be useful in learning to consider a fear, choose to let go of it, and then let it roll away.
It takes practice, but it's certainly helpful.

Because otherwise, if we don't learn to let go of our fears and angers, many people end up prisoners of those mental illusions for life.

So we have to learn how to manage our fear, see beyond it, and not be controlled by it.
We need to refuse to live our lives in constant fear.

And although fear of death may at times be useful for learning or awareness, there are very strict limits as to how useful it can actually be. Because most times, fear is not particularly helpful.
Let's not forget that most violence is a direct result of fear.

We all take reasonable precautions to live longer, but sometimes the cost of living in fear all the time is that it feels like it steals away some of our life before it's actually time to go. So don't let a mental illusion do that.
We all need to learn to be a little more comfortable with an unknown future, and also be able to laugh our worries away sometimes.
There's really no point in worrying about things like death too much.
If it isn't our time to go, then great! And if it is, then afterwards we won't care anyway!
So in the meantime, we can all focus on enjoying our lives, and making this world a better place.

43. Death

Dealing with death is just a part of life.

The fear of death remains one of the primary goads that pushes us along, and there is nothing I can say to take that away from you completely, as we all have that same fear of that same unknown.

However, although death causes people to leave this level of reality to enter the unknown, there is more to it than that.
Many, many people in history have not just believed, but also sensed and even seen, that there is more to our reality than just what we see on the surface.

On some level, we feel it. We know it without knowing.
We sense that there is more going on in the world than just what is in front of us.

And you don't have to believe in God, or any particular religion, to feel that there is something more to being a human being. That we are more than just a body. Call it spirit or consciousness or whatever you like, but to feel that there is something transcendent within.

But regardless, death still scares us, which is understandable.
But you are not alone. All of us walk that path.
Just think about all those who came before you who walked through the same door. And all of the magnificent spirits waiting just on the other side of the door, ready to take our hand and embrace us as soon as we are done with our purpose here.

Sometimes we can make sense of death, and sometimes we can't. But either way, we do the best we can, and we remember that our existence here is mysterious and we often can't understand everything. For example, we don't worry too much about trying to calculate the spiritual numbers of existence, as the spiritual experience is so complex and versatile and veiled that it's beyond our calculation. Some things about existence just remain outside of our understanding, and perhaps they are meant to. Sometimes we have to just let go and be more comfortable with the unknown.

But it's difficult whenever we lose those closest to us.
To lose a close companion on life's journey is hard. Once it's time for them to move on, their path separates and disappears into the mist, but we travel on.
We will meet other wonderful friends along the way, and there are many around us who also need our light in their lives. But still, losing a friend for a while is never easy.

Of course, we'll always see our friend again soon. A human lifetime is like a day in the life of the spirit. So we could live for a hundred more years, and yet still be honest when we say, "I'll be right behind you. I'll see you soon."

We may even see them again in this lifetime, just in a different form, similar to the Buddhist tradition that sometimes sets out a cup of tea for the eventual time when a soul friend returns. More often though, both would be in a different form by then, but it wouldn't matter, as spirit always recognizes spirit.

We all want to live happy and healthy, and we usually want to be here for a longer trip rather than a shorter trip. But we also need to remember to never let our desire to delay the eventuality of death lead us to lose our humanity in the process. A life of a thousand years, with no humanity, is no life at all.

Our body is the vehicle that carries our spirit in this world, but when it's our time, we let it go and move on. And then we walk through the doorway with our spirit shining bright with love. Death will always be scary, but our spirit also yearns to fly free again.

That is, until we return to dance once more.

44. Age

To age gracefully is largely a matter of mindset. Those people who age the most gracefully are often the ones who simply maintain that spark within, that joie de vivre. They never lose that sense of joy and love that lights from within.

And rather than a culture obsessed with looking young due to a fear of age and a fear of death, it would be good if our society actually had an appreciation for age, and most importantly, more of an appreciation for the beauty of that light within.

And on the topic of appreciating age, in a society that becomes a real community, caring for those who are elderly is really not so much of a worry. Because in a real community, whether younger or older, humanity plans for and take cares of one another.

45. Addiction

One reason self-moderation is an important skill is that it helps keep us free of addictions.
It helps us enjoy something without overindulging too often or becoming addicted.

But then, some of the things we become addicted to are beyond self-moderation because they are just by nature so highly addictive and destructive.
Society tends to gradually define where most of those limits are though.
For example, at the moment, American society is starting to relax its opinion on marijuana, which is a relatively soft drug, as opposed to say, hard drugs like heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamine where addiction has consistently destroyed lives.

Although any drug, even a soft drug like alcohol for example, can of course give people very serious addiction and behavior issues when used without moderation.

Fortunately though, society has also gotten much better at making sure people with addiction issues can always receive help.

46. Suicide

Suicide is always unfortunate, but if someone has lived a full life and has a serious illness, for example, then I think it's understandable.
If after a long, hard road, their pain management is no longer working, and someone decides it has reached the point where they can no longer bear living here, then they should be able to leave this particular lifetime on their own terms.
When given the choice, people should be able to leave when and how they choose. They should be able to leave quick and painless and with grace, and on their own terms. It's their life, and they have the right to make that decision.

That aside, things often get better, so why rush it? Death's not going anywhere. And in the meantime, there are always other things to enjoy, and people to meet, and ways to give back. Even just being on Earth allows us to help others who may be suffering here. Often, if we just wait and see how life goes, we end up really glad that we did.

Because more frequently, it's not serious illness that causes suicide, but people who are really depressed and caught up in their own heads.
And those are not at all the people who should be contemplating suicide, those are the people we should be helping.
Sometimes those people are just hanging on the edge, and they need someone to reach out and make contact with them, to bring them back into the human community again, to listen to them, and to speak truthfully to them, to say...
Don't give up.
You are not alone in the world.
We're here with you.
And it's going to be alright.

47. Community

We are never really alone, but we need a community that actually reflects that truth.
And most of us have never had that.

Our society tends to push us towards isolation and competition rather than community.

People shouldn't feel all alone in the world.
We need to work towards a society that doesn't make us feel quite so isolated from one another.

48. Science and Religion

Religion and science can certainly be compatible.
You can believe what you believe and still think that science can be a useful tool for living in the world.
Just like you can make measurements and calculations and still recognize that there may be more to our existence than simply what we observe on the surface.
One can believe in both God and gravity.

And science and religion both have their perils.

Religion, as discussed previously, can either help bring humanity together or it can help tear us apart.

Similarly, science can either help humanity or it can help destroy humanity.
Science can be very useful, but we can also lose any moral framework when we focus solely on whether we *can* do something, without the important question of whether we *should* do something.
We always can create a more powerful nuclear weapon, but should we?
In its quest for the next thing, science sometimes fails to ask the question of why. Is something really a necessity? Are there dangers? Are there important moral limits?
Recent topics with these kinds of implications include attempts to copy beings through genetic cloning and modification, animal testing and experimentation, and attempts to create sentient beings through autonomous artificial intelligence, among others.
The mad scientist can be just as dangerous as the mad religious extremist. Science can certainly be useful, but it can also be used in ways that actually harm us, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually.
So don't forget to ask those important questions.

49. Women and Islam

There is a common view of women in some Muslim societies, although certainly not all Muslim societies, that needs to be noted and discussed some.

In this view, a woman is basically put on a pedestal in a gilded cage.
The woman is protected because she is important to men, but she can also never be free.

The most common rationale for this is that women need to be cherished and protected from other men. But in reality, it is a form of denial and control.
Instead of addressing men's failure to respect women and exercise self-control, and then teaching men to behave differently, it is instead women who must bear the burden of men's misconduct.

The rationale is essentially, "We refuse to teach ourselves to behave differently, so we are going to lock you behind a wall instead. As long as you are out of sight, then there should be no problems."

But women shouldn't have to be hidden behind sheets and walls in order for men to learn to be responsible and control their own behavior.
If certain men can't show self-control and respect for women as human beings, then those men should be the ones walled off, and women should be the ones to walk freely as they choose, not the other way around.

Sometimes, rather than going through the difficult task of learning to change, we instead try to mold a world that will fit with what we don't want to change in ourselves.
But instead of hiding women in the shadows, men need to address their own issues of self-control and empathy, and learn to treat women like equals. Men need to evolve.
Fortunately, many Muslims already have a deep understanding that the real battle is within.

But as discussed previously, this kind of male behavior is by no means limited to certain Muslim societies. In both the East and the West, in the US and elsewhere, women should not have to live in a world where they can't walk down the street without being harassed.
But the responsibility for changing that sexist culture should be placed squarely on the men, not on the women.

Women should not be harassed while walking down the street, nor should they have to be hidden behind a sheet so that they are not.
It's about changing men's behavior and culture, so that women can always walk down any street in the world and be both free and equal.

And there are also other religious issues involved, such as viewing women as subservient, or even as property.

And similarly, some fundamentalist Christians' views of women as being in a subservient or secondary role to men based on old religious passages, are just as archaic and flawed.
Those types of social laws were created entirely by men, and fallible men at that.
Throughout history, men were frequently afraid of women exercising free will and having that threaten their absolutist view of the world, and more specifically, their control over women.
But men need to evolve past archaic and unjust views.

One effect commonly seen in both eastern and western societies is that women are either revered upon a pedestal, or unfairly blamed as the scapegoat, and sometimes both.
When they should be neither. They should simply be equals.

As previously discussed, views of women in the western world can certainly be unhealthy and burdensome for women, and that is still evolving. But regardless, in most of those countries, women still have choice. If they want to work, or drive a car, or wear anything from a burka to a bikini, it's up to them. They live how they choose.
The most important difference is *choice*.

If women in some Muslim societies choose to wear a veil, or not to drive cars, then that is of course completely fine.
But they deserve the right to make those choices for themselves.

If you truly love a woman, then you should always want her to be free to choose her own path.

50. Keep an open mind.

Try to keep the mind open and flexible.
We don't have to accept everything, by any means, but unless we've got everything in life all figured out, it's difficult to continue to learn with a closed mind.

We don't want to shut ourselves off from all views but our own, or surround ourselves only with the people who agree with us. If we only pay attention to the people who agree with us, we often become walled off, tunnel-visioned, or polarized.
But we need to see different sides.
Because you never know where truth will come from.

We need to be comfortable with not having all of the answers. It's important to be able to say, "Or maybe I'm wrong," because we will all be wrong sometimes.

But having an open mind doesn't require complete relativism or being without any opinion.
It doesn't mean we can't still think things are right or wrong, or healthy or unhealthy, and state those opinions when we think it's important.

It just means that we remain open to the possibility that we could be wrong or that we might not have all of the answers in a given situation.

Because the ability to keep a balanced, flexible, open mind, as opposed to a closed mind, really is essential to our learning as a human being.

51. Live, Laugh, Love.

It's important to take seriously the responsibility we all have to help the world, but it's also important not to lose touch with our joyful spirit.
We do what we can to help, but we also need to enjoy our lives.
So remember to laugh and love and play.

Live in the now. Live a life full of love and wonder.

If we look at life as all work and no play, it's tough to survive here and enjoy it.
And if we look at it as the opposite, we tend to just waste our time here.
So we need to find our balance of the two.
Life can be a good mix of work and play.
We can help, but also have fun. And often the two coincide, as the helping of others in turn gives us joy.

And don't let negativity keep you down.
It's always good to be able to say, "No worries," take a breath, laugh, and enjoy life.
Making the world a better place is incredibly important and we'll work hard at it, but we'll also enjoy our lives too.
So live, laugh, love.

Our souls love to fly in joy.

52. Conclusion - Paradigm Shift

We are at a turning point.
A point where we can finally shift the course of humanity in a new direction.
Instead of always passing the burden of change on to future generations, we can choose to change the world ourselves.

We can commit to ending the cycle of violence that has plagued humanity.
We can commit to social equality, to economic equality, to sustainability, and to tolerance of religious plurality.

And like any turning point in an epic story, it will be a challenge.
On the one hand, it will be very difficult, but on the other hand, it will give us a future of bright and infinite possibility, which is exhilarating.

But any Paradigm Shift requires making a choice.
And that choice is definitely a test for humanity's love and wisdom.

Our world can be so much better.
But we have to choose it.

[A Note on Publishing]

I placed this book in the public domain and waived copyright, because I wanted to make sure that it could always be read, downloaded, printed, or shared for free by anyone at any time, regardless of whether anyone ever publishes it for profit simultaneously. Mainly, I wanted to make sure that the work would always be available.

As for my author name, I felt anonymity was important at the time of writing, so I chose a pen name. I actually just chose letters at random until coming up with the name, and then I also liked that it essentially formed a root word meaning "to fly."
But I also realized later after publishing that there is someone who has a very similar author name (except for capitalization), and my apologies to them, as the similarity was definitely unintentional.

As for other followup books, I'm not going to write any. But I did create this Revised Edition. It allowed me to fix a few typos, make a few clarifications, add page numbers for printing, etc. The only major changes made were the Introduction, which I felt was important to add to help frame the work in a way that would help readers, and also, there were additions and edits to 4.6 on Christianity as often practiced, which I felt needed to be made somewhat stronger and more comprehensive given recent history, and also additions and edits to 4.37 on Truth and Reality, which has become so relevant and important recently.

In all, people will agree or disagree, and be inspired or not inspired from this book, and as always, learn from life at their own pace on their own journey.
But I hope this work will help, and be a useful tool on some of those journeys.